SHORT STORIES.

Splendid Holiday Number. 1D.

No. 710.

August 9th, 1902.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, my bicycle seemed to leap into the air, and I was flung violently into the road.

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(A Thrilling Incident from the Powerful Story, "The Hound of Death." See Inside.)

"Let's Talk of Graves"

Shakespeare

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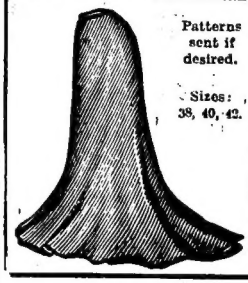

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Short Stories

No. 710.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending August 9th, 1902.

THE HOUND OF DEATH.

A Thrilling Little Tale of a Lover's Rescue.

"I appoint as sole guardian to my dear daughter, Enid Lennox, my old and valued friend Derwent Lauderdale."

The words fell on my ears like a funeral knell. I half rose from my seat and muttered a suppressed exclamation, then, remembering that expostulation was useless, and seeing the grave faces round me, I sank back into my chair again with a stifled groan.

I was listening to the reading of my father's will, and I had never felt so alone in the world as on the day when I learnt that I was a wealthy heiress, in possession of more money than I had ever dreamt my father owned.

For all the long list of shares and stocks and estates that were mine, fell upon deaf ears, after the sound of those opening words, appointing as my sole guardian the man I feared and hated beyond anyone in the world—Derwent Lauderdale!

Why he and my father had ever been friends was one of those mysteries impossible of solution. Why I disliked him seemed to be very easy of explanation as I glanced across the library at his thin, evil face, with its closely shut, smiling lips, and the little grey eyes which flashed across at me from under their beetling brows.

The reading of the will ended at last and Mr. Lauderdale crossed to my side.

"I trust, Miss Lennox," he said, in his suavest accents, "that in our new relations of guardian and ward, we may continue on the excellent terms which we have always maintained."

I laughed. I could not help it, unseemly as the sound was in that hushed atmosphere. But it was so absurd to talk of our excellent terms, when he must have known I had always hated him—always—always!

"I shall consult your wishes, of course," he went on smoothly. "Would you like to remain here in your own town house with a chaperone, or will you allow my wife to welcome you under our roof?"

"I will stay here," I answered shortly—too shortly for diplomacy. I saw his brow darken, and though he smiled assent I had made him more of an enemy than before.

He left the room then, and the old lawyer explained to me that I should become my own mistress only when I was twenty-five, or when I married.

"Until then Mr. Lauderdale controls your property, and you are in his charge," the old man said—"and——"

He broke off his sentence suddenly, fidgeted uneasily from one foot to the other, and then, stooping towards me, whispered—

"I should advise you to marry as soon as possible, Miss Lennox."

He said the words so very earnestly that I was surprised, though my sad heart gave a quick, responsive leap, as I thought of a kindly face, and tender eyes that had grown very dear to me during the past six months.

True, Brian Dalrymple had not yet asked me to be his wife, but I knew (Oh! a woman always knows) that he loved me as I had learnt to love him. I realised intuitively that only my father's long illness had hindered him from coming forward as my suitor, and I felt that it would be easy indeed to comply with my lawyer's advice, though I wondered why he advised me so urgently.

Well, his words comforted, whilst they puzzled me.

Ever since I had heard those ominous words appointing Mr. Lauderdale as my guardian, I had wondered whether he would allow me to listen to Brian Dalrymple's wooing, for the man I loved was not rich, and Mr. Lauderdale, I had feared, would regard his suit with scant favour.

But the lawyer's urgent words cheered me! Perhaps, after all, if they were so anxious that I should marry, my guardian would listen to Brian's suit, and surely, I reflected, Mr. Lauderdale would be only too glad to get rid of me and the responsibilities I entailed as fast as possible.

I was happier that evening than I had thought it possible I could be, but, alas, my happiness was short-lived indeed!

Two days later Brian Dalrymple stood with me in the library, telling me how dearly he loved me, asking me to be his wife, holding me in his dear arms close against his breast, looking into my eyes with eyes so full of love that I shivered from sheer joy.

"I only wish, sweetheart," he said, "that you were less rich. I had a hard battle with my pride before I could make up my mind to come to you."

"And love was stronger than pride?" I whispered back. "You would have spoilt two lives if you had let pride win. Now, we shall be so happy—so very, very happy!"

How little I dreamt when I spoke what a terrible gulf lay between me—and happiness!

The blow fell two days later, when, in answer to a letter I

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wrote my guardian telling him of my engagement, he appeared in person in my Sloane Street house.

As he entered the drawing-room I sprang up to greet him, recoiling at sight of his face. It was blanched and stern, and his eyes positively glared at me.

"Miss Lennox," he said frigidly, when we had shaken hands, "Let us understand one another at once. I should be fulfilling my duties as guardian very ill if I allowed you to marry a man of Mr. Dalrymple's circumstances."

I pleaded with him, I argued with him; finally I grew angry with him. But all was in vain. His smooth manner had vanished completely. I felt the iron hand under the velvet glove. He was stern, implacable, immovable.

"The marriage is impossible," he said, and I, when I found my pleading of no avail, fell silent, only determining in my own mind that come what might, I would marry Brian—some day.

But oh, how my heart sank when Mr. Lauderdale ended by saying quietly, in a stony voice that sent a chill of terror through me.

"My wife is with me. I consider the chaperone you have inefficient. You will return with us to-night to my house—for a time, at least."

I began by flatly refusing to go with them. I went on to beg to be allowed to remain in my own house. I ended—well, as any woman would have ended upon whom Mr. Lauderdale's cold, snake-like eye was fixed, by agreeing with a shiver to go with him and his wife.

I disliked her as much as I did him.

She was one of those women who remind one of cats; soft and pussy like, smooth outwardly, with claws under their dainty paws, and teeth behind their pleasant smiles.

She expressed unbounded pleasure at the idea of my going with them to Danmore—their house in Surrey—and appeared ignorant of the reason of my sudden move.

All the same, she never left me alone for a single minute whilst I made my preparations for the journey, and though I did contrive to scribble a hasty line to Brian to warn him of what had occurred, I had no opportunity of giving it to one of the servants, or of posting it myself before we left.

The Lauderdales watched me as cats watch mice, and a nightmare feeling began to settle down upon me that I was like a prisoner, never again in all my life to be free. Yet why, why—why should they treat me in such a fashion? That was the question which revolved wearily in my mind during the whole journey to Danmore.

Evening had fallen when we drove from the little country station up a long ascent between high hedges which made the lane absolutely pitchy in its blackness.

I had never known the Lauderdales in their country house. They had been London friends of my father, and to me scarcely more than acquaintances, and under the present circumstances I was less than ever inclined to feel amiable towards them, though they were both almost gushing in their attentions to me.

They had succeeded in sweeping me away from London, and in preventing me from communicating with the man I loved, they had every reason to feel satisfied, whilst I grew more miserable at every step we went.

The more I thought over my hurried departure from home the more bewildered I grew.

Why was my guardian so averse to my marriage? And why had I allowed him to bring me away?

I could answer neither question, but each time I met his grey, basilisk eyes and looked into his stern face with its smooth, set smile, I felt how impossible resistance would have been.

"Danmore at last," he said, rousing me from my meditations with a start. We had been driving for miles and miles, now I dimly discerned the outlines of a house before which the carriage drew up with a jerk, and in whose windows lights were burning.

"Welcome to Danmore," Mr. Lauderdale exclaimed, as the front door opened and he helped me up the steps into a large, bare hall, "May you be happy here!"

There was nothing sinister in the words, yet as he spoke a long shudder ran through me, and as the servant shut the great front door with a clang, an agony of fear shook me from head to foot.

* * * * *

"What is it? Oh, what is it?"

I heard myself say the words, and as I spoke them I leapt from my bed with a cry of intolerable fear.

Something had wakened me suddenly—what was it? What——

There it was again!

Upon the night air there fell an awful sound, a sound that seemed to chill the very marrow in my bones—the deep, angry baying of a big hound, and the sound seemed to come from close, close under my room.

Never pausing to think, I flung on a dressing-gown and rushed into the passage, breathless with fright—a nameless horror gripping my very soul. I almost ran into somebody moving towards me. There was a sharp exclamation and I found myself face to face with my guardian.

"Miss Lennox!" he cried.

"I am frightened!" I half sobbed, "What is that noise? The dog, where is it—why——"

He laughed pleasantly.

"Poor Rex! Has he frightened you?" he said. "He is an amiable hound—old and toothless, whose bark is his sole strong point. Do not be afraid of him, Miss Lennox."

I crept back to my room ashamed of my folly, and lay down again—but not to sleep. and early morning found me up and dressed, determined to survey my new surroundings before my keepers, as I called them in my own mind, were up.

My heart sank as I looked out of my window. A neglected garden lay below, bounded by a high wall, over which I could catch a far-away glimpse of a white ribbon of road. But how far away that road looked! How utterly inaccessible!

I was a prisoner! There was no doubt of it; I was a prisoner and closely watched—though why the Lauderdales wished to keep me in seclusion was more than I could imagine.

The weary, weary days dragged by, and no news came to me from the outer world of Brian. I heard nothing, nor had I any means of writing to him. The Lauderdales took good care of that.

And a great despair began to settle on my soul; I began to feel I should go mad if I stayed much longer in this dreary house, where my nights were disturbed by the baying of the hound, and my days dogged by my guardian and his wife. Over and over again I felt I could have screamed aloud for sheer misery, and I could not understand it all—nor would Mr. Lauderdale ever vouchsafe to explain it.

I grew thin and white, I scarcely knew my own face in the glass. I got into a way of crying quietly when I was alone; I felt like an old, old woman, and as if I had lived in that horrible place for years, so cut off was I from all I had known and loved before; and then—a strange thing happened.

One day I was walking in the garden between those hateful high walls, when suddenly, as I passed the kitchen window in my trampings to and fro, I heard a voice say softly:

"Don't look round, or answer, but listen."

The voice seemed strange to me. I tried not to look towards it, as it went on:

"He would kill me if he knew I warned you,

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but I must—I must—if you do not leave this house your life is in danger. You must go at once."

I paced on as if I had heard nothing; then I came back again—the voice resumed:

"Don't you know that by the terms of your father's will, your guardian receives a large annuity till you marry and pass out of his hands. And—" here the voice dropped mysteriously, "if you die half your property goes to your guardian."

I started violently. I could not help it.

"You must go at once," the voice said again, "at dinner to-night make an excuse to leave the room; take the bicycle from the shed; you will find the door in the wall unlocked. I——"

Curiosity overpowered discretion. I glanced round and to my unbounded amazement saw Mrs. Lauderdale's face pressed against the window bars.

"You?" I gasped.

"Hush," she said, "for—it is I—you—you are so like my child who died, I could not see you injured—perhaps—perhaps—worse. Ah! go to-night, and beware of Rex."

With an abrupt movement she left the window, and I walked on, my brain in a whirl.

Was Mrs. Lauderdale my friend then—after all?

* * * * *

It was evening, and I stood trembling and alone beside the shed in the yard where the bicycle was kept, every nerve strung to the highest pitch of tension.

How everything seemed to creak and groan as I took the bicycle from its place and carried—because I dared not wheel it—to the gate.

Yes! the gate *was* unlocked! Mrs. Lauderdale had been as good as her word, and I slipped softly out, closing it behind me. Oh! the good white ribbon of road; how I loved it! How my heart sang for joy as I mounted my bicycle and rode swiftly away.

Was it true that I was free again? Was that nightmare of a house behind me for ever?

Should I be able to shake myself free of Mr. Lauderdale, and marry Brian and be happy after my long misery? Should —Hush!—what was that? My heart stood still.

Far off along the road behind me I heard the baying of a hound.

Then I laughed at my fears, for had not my guardian said the dog was old and toothless. Had not——

Cold perspiration all at once broke out all over me, for Mrs. Lauderdale's words swept into my mind:

"Beware of Rex," and as I thought of them, the awful bell-like notes of the dog's voice came less faintly in the breeze.

He was no longer chained in his kennel; he was loose somewhere on the road behind; he—the thought gripped at my heart like an ice-cold hand—he was pursuing *me!*"

I pedalled furiously. Leaning down upon the handle-bars I rode at a pace I could never have dreamt of riding in more sober moments.

Fear lent me strength, and I rode like the wind, whilst the baying behind me rose loudly, then died away, only to rise again with renewed vigour.

I came to a hill up which I had perforce to walk, and those awful sounds seemed each moment to draw nearer and nearer, and yet I tried to still my fears by assuring myself that the dog was old and harmless in spite of my remembrance of Mrs. Lauderdale's warning.

On the brow of the hill an old man met me. His face looked white in the twilight.

"Is the dog loose?" he whispered fearfully.

"Yes—but he is old and toothless," I answered.

"He is the fiercest, youngest bloodhound in the county," the man replied, "and if he is after you, ride for your life."

"Ride for your life — for your life," — the words sang and shrieked in my ears as I mounted and tore on again—the wind whistling round me.

Oh! the horror of it, the horror of it! "Ride for your life—for your life—"

I found myself sobbing out the sentence in a kind of ryhthm; whilst my eyes seemed literally starting from my head with fatigue, my limbs almost refused to move from sheer exhaustion.

"Ride for your life—for your life"—my pace had slackened, I could not keep it up; already I was breathing great painful breaths, my heart thumping like a sledge hammer—and the baying drew nearer—nearer—nearer.

The darkness was gathering round me. I could scarcely see the road over which I skimmed, my mind was wholly intent on the one thought of flight, when—all at once—without an instant's warning, my bicycle seemed to leap into the air, I was conscious of a grinding, crunching sound below me, and in another second I was flung violently into the road.

A stone in my path, hidden by the darkness, had done the work, and I lay in the dust for a moment too stunned to even rise.

Then the fearsome sound behind me recalled me to my senses, for it was close, close upon me now.

With a cry of unutterable despair I sprang to my feet, and rushed towards the bicycle that lay by the roadside.

But I was too late! Already round the bend of the road I caught a glimpse of two bloodshot gleaming eyes. I could hear the laboured breathing of the great hound; yes, I could even feel his hot breath upon me. With just one thought in my mind, "I will die game," I gripped at my bicycle and stood upright beside it, as the dog with a fiendish yelp of delight, sprang towards me, bearing me downwards by his great weight—down, down, down, until a great darkness seemed to settle down all around me — and I knew no more.

* * * * *

When the light came back to me I lay in Brian's arms—his dear face was close to mine, and the great dog lay dead at his feet!

Nothing seemed strange in that night of strange things; it was only natural and beautiful that Brian should be there to help me. But as full consciousness came back to me I realised that his presence was little short of miraculous.

He had vainly tried to discover my whereabouts, and at last, in despair had accepted an invitation to stay with his friends in Surrey.

Feeling tired and wretched that evening he had strolled out along the road near his friends' house, taking a gun with him!

And—he had saved my life.

The long arm of coincidence is more wonderful sometimes than we know, and the age of miracles is not ended yet.

Needless to say that I was able to bring such damning evidence against Mr. Lauderdale that he no longer resides peacefully at Danmore, but is detained in one of His Majesty's convict establishments.

For poor Mrs. Lauderdale I have something akin to affection —my great likeness to her daughter induced her to rescue me from what she believed would be my fate. She was sure her husband intended—either to keep me a permanent prisoner, or to put me out of the world altogether.

Brian and I are married and are very happy, but we shall neither of us ever forget the ghastly night long ago, when, but for him, I should verily have fallen into the jaws of the Hound of Death.

L. G. Moberly.

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An Innocent Intrigue.

A Comedy-Drama of Real Life.

CHARACTERS.

Ethel Harte	*Spinster.*
Cecil Havergal	*Bachelor.*
Max Edenheim	*Scientist.*

"I CAN'T think what it is that is coming to you lately, Ethel!"

"No? I am afraid that I am very much in the same predicament; only that my ignorance doesn't worry me—in the least." "But the thing does worry—and annoy *me*."

"Perhaps you will be a little more explicit, sir; for, so far, your statement can hardly be said to be definite. We will agree to waive the question of its politeness."

"I impolite—to *you?*"

"I didn't say so."

"Oh!—I thought you did."

"First thoughts, as you ought to be aware, are nearly always unreliable."

"Look here, Ethel!" said Cecil Havergal, hardly able to control his irritation. "This word-fencing leads to nothing. I mean——"

"There!" she petulantly interrupted him. "It is to know what you *mean* that I am patiently waiting, instead of keeping a most important engagement."

"Engagement!—what engagement?" he blurted out; not over diplomatically, it must be confessed.

A surprised lifting of the eyebrows, together with the faintest possible shrugging of the shapely shoulders, was all she vouchsafed him in reply to his undoubtedly too bluntly-put query.

High-spirited, and of a naturally independent position, Ethel Harte was a girl not by any means inclined to be dictated to by even the man to whom she had promised herself; and was altogether indisposed to look favourably upon a dress rehearsal by her *fiancé* of his part in the forthcoming matrimonial drama.

As for allowing herself to be disturbed by any manifestation of jealous feeling in the person of her future lord and master, such an idea never entered her pretty little head; being no believer in the contention that jealousy—masculine jealousy, that is—is to be accepted as an infallible test of love.

"Come, Ethel! You'll tell me all about this engagement of yours, won't you?"

"No! If I'm not worth trusting, I'm not worth having."

"Nonsense, Ethel! I have a right to know!"

"I think not—at present."

"Well," he said desperately, "you will at least say if it is a man or a woman whom you are going to meet?"

"I see no objection to my answering that question. As a matter of fact, it is neither; and yet one of them. My appointment is with a gentleman."

Her emphatic rendering of the last word fairly infuriated him.

"Very well!" he said, taking up his hat and moving towards the drawing-room door, "very well! Perhaps you will favour me also with the gentleman's name?"

"Certainly not!"

"The object of your visit to him then?"

"No!"

"Of course, you are aware of the construction that may be placed upon your refusal?"

"That is a matter which concerns me but very little. But you must excuse me. I have no more time to spare."

There was evidently nothing further to be said, and Cecil Havergal, for once forgetting his courtesy in his disappointment and chagrin, left the room without word or sign of farewell.

At the end of the street something impelled him to look back. There was a hansom at the door of No. 17.

Presently she came out, got into the cab, and drove away in the opposite direction.

Angry beyond measure, both with himself and with her, he sought his club, and buried himself in the current news of the day.

But it would not do; Ethel Harte's eyes seemed to be looking at him in every line of the newspaper—now mockingly, now wistfully—but always honestly and truly.

"Confound it all! if I've made a mistake. I'm a brutal humbug!" he said to himself. "And yet, she admitted herself, that she had an appointment with a gentleman! No, there's nothing for it, but to find the fellow—thrash him—and break with her for ever."

At this moment a club friend drew his attention to a paragraph in one of the illustrated papers.

It had reference to a trial trip, that afternoon, from a well-known pleasure park in the north-west of London, of a new air-ship; the invention of one Dr. Max Edenheim, an eminent young German scientist.

"You are always discussing things aeronautic, Havergal; this ought to interest you," said Major Palliser. "They tell me that nothing has as yet been seen like it, and that even Santos Dumont himself is shaking in his shoes about it."

Now, if there was one thing more than another which appealed to Cecil Havergal's intelligence, it was the scientific conquest of the air. It was not strange that he should not have heard of this particular bid for fame and fortune, in connection with the blue ribbon of aerial navigation, inasmuch as Max Edenheim had kept his secret until nearly the hour of trial. He had selected this country for the experiment, for reasons too sufficiently obvious to need detailing here.

"I would go with you myself," remarked the Major, "bu the War Office claims me this afternoon. I very much fancy however, that Dr. Edenheim and the War Office are not altogether unacquainted, and that sooner or later we shall be hearing something about military air-ships."

Regarding it as something which might distract his mind a bit from other and more worrying matters, Cecil Havergal

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decided to run northward, and witness the German inventor's experiment.

* * * * * * *

Wentworth Park is the happy hunting ground of the sport-cyclist, the running man, the footballer, and the holiday maker.

On this particular occasion, however, it was being used strictly in the interests of science.

The crowd assembled there was eminently well dressed and orderly; consisting, as it did, largely of that class which usually affects the Royal Institution lectures in Albemarle Street.

Towering above everybody was the fair, stalwart son of the Fatherland, who, although the object of a thousand questions—mostly idiotic and irrelevant—had eyes and ears for little else than the child of his brain and patience—the wonderful machine floating at anchor above the heads of the gaping throng.

It wanted some twenty minutes to the arranged time of starting, when Max Edenheim had a card put into his hand.

"Tut-tut!" he said, half aloud, and knitting his brows impatiently. "I thought that I had made this foolish young lady to see the folly of this whim of hers. Well, I must go over it all again, I suppose, for I can't and I won't take her!"

Good humouredly elbowing his way through the crowd, he strode in the direction of a small wooden building used, on this occasion, as a sort of workshop for the convenience of the Doctor and his assistants.

"Ah! Miss Harte!" he said, with continental, if not too effusive politeness. "I did not expect you here to-day after our talk the other evening at Sir John Kinnerton's."

"And, Dr. Edenheim, I fully intended not to come; but—but something occurred to-day——to make me change my mind."

"Ah! that was a pity—a great pity—for, you see, I cannot possibly allow you to accompany me. For myself, as I told you, the risk is nothing; for you, or rather for those who love you, it is everything."

"But Doctor! supposing that I agree to ignore the risk; to think only of the intense delight this maiden trip in your wonderful air-ship would give me—what then?"

"Just this!—that I must still refuse you your request."

As Max Edenheim said, he had reasoned with her at the Royal Society President's *soirée*, seeing clearly that her desire to share the risk and glory (if successful) of the trip, was due to a mere craving for adventure.

Though she had made up her mind to gracefully accept the Doctor's decision, she had allowed her disappointment to colour her treatment of her lover. When, therefore, he ventured to remonstrate with her, she, in the contrary spirit common to most women of a like nature, resolved to make another effort to get her way, and at the same time to punish her betrothed for his contumacy.

Now, Max Edenheim was not as are the majority of men; he was a man of many moods; a man of impulse, but one whose impulses seldom led him to make mistakes.

Looking at his watch, he saw that but five minutes remained to starting time.

"Miss Harte," he said, seriously, "it is only fair that as you have changed your mind, so I have changed mine. You *shall* ascend with me; and I will trust to the god of good fortune to bring you safely to earth again."

Then did she begin to regret her success.

"Dr. Edenheim," she said nervously, "if you really think it better that I should not go, I will not."

"That is just it!" he replied. "On consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it may do you good."

He quite thought that it would; this big, brainy German; for he had such supreme confidence in the ultimate triumph of his machine, that, although he was ready to face whatever risk there might be, he felt no real fear in inducing this wilful girl to make the venturous attempt.

"Come!" he said, "everything is ready! and if you will be good enough to follow me, I will settle you in the car at the moment of casting-off."

In the front rank of the excited spectators there now stood one who had arrived during the last ten minutes.

As has been said, Cecil Havergal was an enthusiast in all matters aeronautic, and, so far as was permissible, was closely examining the machine, and everything connected with it.

The parting of the crowd behind him made him to look round.

In an instant he saw, or imagined he saw, it all.

Within a few feet of him was Ethel Harte, in earnest conversation with the tall German, who, he was informed, was the hero of the day.

He was so absolutely dumfounded that, instead of addressing Ethel, he let the pushing crowd edge him further away from her.

What followed was so lightning-like in its action that before he could speak or move Edenheim had lifted Ethel into the car, the anchoring cords were loosed, and, with a mighty "swish" upward, the almost animate monster launched itself into its proper element.

Like a man demented he sought the secretary of the Aero Club, whom he saw watching the airship's flight with a pair of powerful binoculars.

"Carter," he said (being himself a member of the club he knew the secretary intimately), "for God's sake!—tell me—do you think the thing's safe? I want to know! for—for that young lady—you saw her—well, she is a—a friend of mine, and I wouldn't have anything happen to her for—for—what do you think?"

"My dear fellow! there's a risk, of course; there always is in these trial trips; but, so far as I'm able to judge—knowing Dr. Edenheim and the value of his work—I should say that the chances are more than even that his ship will make port, and that its inventor will wake to-morrow morning to find himself famous, beyond even any dreams that he may have dreamt."

"Well, Carter! I think you know. Now, tell me, where does Dr. Edenheim propose, if he is successful, to descend?"

"At St. Albans. If, however, you contemplate being in at the finish, I'm afraid you will be disappointed; for there is nothing fast enough to get you there in advance of the ship."

Cecil Havergal, for the second time that day, was strangely discourteous; for, beyond a curt nod, he said or did nothing in acknowledgment of his friend's informatory kindness; turning away in feverish haste and making for the entrance.

Outside were carriages and cabs without number.

Signing to the driver of a hansom, he jumped in, and, almost shouting out "station!" soon found himself bowling along at a hand-gallop.

A train for St. Albans was signalled and in sight as the cab dashed into the station yard, and drew alongside the platform as he rushed out with his ticket and change in his hand.

That ride to St. Albans was a record one for him.

As he detrained at the old Hertfordshire town, he instinctively looked up into the sky, in search of that which contained all that he held most dear in the whole world.

His range of vision was, however, limited; the booking-office buildings blocking out his view on that side.

He could see nothing.

There was no official about to whom he could address himself for information, except a solitary bucolic specimen in porter's corduroy, who, grinning

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vacantly, pointed in vague fashion in the direction of the town, in reply to an excited query as to whether anything had as yet been seen of the airship.

Deaf to the porter's demand for his ticket, Havergal rushed through the wicket, out into the station road, to see a big crowd—townsfolk and railway people—gazing up at Max Edenheim's wonderful machine as it floated gracefully over the Cathedral, preparatory to a descent.

Evidently it was the "Doctor's" intention and desire to come down in a large meadow some half mile to the south of the old Abbey church.

But Havergal and the others, intently watching the intrepid aeronaut's operations, soon saw that something had gone wrong with the rudder ropes, and that, to a large extent, Edenheim had lost control of the aerostat!

* * * * * *

Ethel Harte, white of face and trembling in every limb, did not dare to speak to her companion, whose set features and compressed lips showed that the situation was at least serious.

Crouched down in the fore part of the "basket," so as to enable Edenheim to have a good look-out ahead, everything in her, save the sheer "woman," died once and for ever.

Frightened, not only for herself, but for what might mean the loss of a good and true man's love and trust, she could do nothing but bitterly reproach herself for her worse than foolish obstinacy.

Max Edenheim, though pre-occupied with striving to force the machine against the wind in the desired direction, glanced down once, and saw that the girl had learnt her lesson. She was shedding hot, blinding tears, as though her heart would break.

Judging it best to say nothing, he made one more big effort to clear the rudder lines.

At an altitude of about seven hundred feet, the ship was now free of the Cathedral, and immediately over the fifteenth century tower of St. Michael's Church.

Then it began to descend, and not all the "Doctor's" efforts could, unless something miraculous intervened, prevent a terrible catastrophe.

Among the gaping crowd below was a certain local steeplejack. Breaking loose from the throng, this man made a bee-line for the church.

First trying the door of the tower, he found it locked. But he knew every coign and projection of the outside walls.

Selecting a spot up which ran an iron water pipe, he proceeded to shin up it, hand over hand.

More than once in the ascent he kicked with his foot a piece of crumbling mortar or a loose brick, which fell with a crash on to the stone paving below.

It was doubtful which sight, the imperilled air-ship or the venturous steeplejack, had the greatest interest for the spectators.

One supreme moment there was, when, the "ship" having dropped to within touching distance of the top of the tower, the framework supporting the car and the mechanical apparatus, became perilously entangled about one of the four corner pinnacles; the car, with its two occupants hanging, suspended by irresponsible ropes and bamboo débris, literally in mid air, from, what the aeronaut feared, the tottering stone ornament.

More than three parts of the way up, the steeple-jack was half blinded and badly bruised by the shock-dislodged material.

"He's down!" shouted one section of the crowd below.

"No, he isn't!" was the reassuring roar of another.

As, indeed, he was not; for just pausing an instant to take breath, the brave fellow continued his upward climb, till, with a mighty last effort, he gripped the guttering at the base of the castellations, and swung himself over on to the tower leads.

The rest was comparatively easy. Hauling on the main car rope, he managed to bring the basket close alongside the battlements.

Max Edenheim's first thought was for the half-fainting girl. Raising her in his arms, he handed her carefully to their rescuer, following himself when he saw that she was in safety.

By this time the church officials had opened the tower door and were prepared to render every assistance.

As though Fate were determined to make him suffer to the bitter end, Cecil Havergal, in his eagerness to find a quicker route to the scene of action, got hopelessly involved, and amid a maze of side streets and lanes, so that when he arrived at the tower foot it was to learn that the "Doctor" and Ethel had gone to the "George Hotel" for rest and dinner.

The young lady who presided in the combined bar and office at the "George," could not help wondering at the excitable manner of the good-looking gentleman, who wanted no refreshment, no accommodation, only some information.

"The lady and gentleman who descended—I mean, who accidently fell—in the airship—half an hour ago, are they staying here?"

"Yes, sir. Dr. Edenheim is in the dining-room and the lady is resting upstairs."

"Thanks! I will go to the dining-room, and see—er—Dr. Edenheim."

"Very good, sir."

It must have been Fate again that brought Ethel downstairs at the precise moment that Cecil Havergal opened the door of the dining-room; either that or fortuitous circumstance.

She quickened her steps upon seeing him, and he, letting go the handle of the door, took both her hands in his, and wrung them till she cried out.

It was she who spoke first.

"Come in! Come in! There is someone in there whom you must know."

He drew back a little at this, but she would not be denied, and before he well knew where he was, she had him inside and was introducing him to the fair, smiling giant, who stood under the chandelier with outstretched hand.

"Dr. Edenheim," cried Ethel, "please tell Mr. Havergal the whole sum of my wickedness in wanting to do what you denied to your own wife. Yes, Cecil, Mrs. Edenheim, whom we are expecting here every minute, was wiser than I, for she obeyed."

"But I don't quite understand," said Havergal slowly. "If Dr. Edenheim did not approve of your mad desire to go, how came it that you went after all."

"That, Mr. Havergal, I must plead guilty to," said the Doctor, with the mock air of a penitent. "I fancied that by letting Miss Harte go, it would in the end be better for her; as it would, I believed, almost certainly result in her never wanting to undergo such a risk again. And I don't think I was wrong, Miss Harte, was I, eh?"

"Are you angry, dear?" she asked, as the Doctor discreetly left the room, ostensibly to make himself presentable for dinner.

"Angry, sweetheart! No. But you won't do it again, will you?"

"Never!" she said, with a happy look in her eyes.

And he would stake his life that she never will.

Ralph Enderby.

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THE LADYBIRD.

A Mere Episode.

It was all so absurdly trivial. In fact, she had almost forgotten what it was about. They had quarrelled before, lots of times, and over much more serious matters, but they had always made it up again directly afterwards — until now.

Now she came to think of it, it was always she who had begun the quarrel and he who had begun the making-up.

And quite right, too, she said to herself. When he proposed to her, he had told her that he worshipped her, that he was her slave till death, that, for her sake, he was ready to go through fire and water. She had only to command, and he would obey.

Very well, then, she had taken him at his word. She had commanded, and he had obeyed—until now.

She had never asked him to go through fire or water for her. No, she was much too reasonable for that. She had never demanded the impossible. The things she had expected him to do were all quite simple and easy.

"I wouldn't order George about quite so much, if I were you, Kate," her sister had said to her the other day.

"What do you mean?" she asked, in amazement.

"Well, I don't exactly know how to explain it," said Em. "You know you're quite a pleasant, easy-going sort of person, generally speaking, but with George you're a perfect tyrant. I sometimes wonder why he puts up with you."

"You don't understand," returned Kate, loftily. "When a man is in love with his wife, it is the greatest pleasure and privilege in the world for him to do her bidding."

"Even if it makes him look a fool?" asked Em, whereupon Kate preserved a dignified silence.

Of course, Em had never been married, never been engaged even, and consequently knew nothing about the feelings of people in love.

Yet, somehow, those words of Em's rankled.

She thought of them now, as she stole into the garden, where George had taken refuge after dinner. She knew where she would find him. He was sitting in his favourite place, under the old apple tree at the back of the lawn, unconscious of her presence.

Noiselessly she stole up behind him, and stood watching him, as he moodily puffed at his pipe.

A ladybird had dropped from some overhanging bough, and was crawling slowly up his back, in the direction of his collar.

Had she really made George look a fool? And did he mind looking a fool—for her sake? Surely the ideal, the perfect husband should shrink from nothing, not even ridicule, incurred in his wife's service. And yet—and yet—no man likes to be made to look a fool. It isn't in human nature.

Thoughtfully she stared at the ladybird, as it made its slow, laborious journey across George's light coat.

After all, perhaps she had expected him to do a little too much fetching and carrying, and all that sort of thing.

Of course, man should wait on woman. That was perfectly right and proper, but—there are limits to everything. Was George beginning to recognise this? Was that the reason why he had not been as ready as usual to patch up their last little squabble?

Now she came to think of it, she remembered how the squabble had originated.

She had commissioned him to get a certain back number of an illustrated paper that contained a portrait which she admired.

The offices of the paper were in Fleet Street, and George had an office in Holborn, so that it would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to get that paper. But no, he had simply forgotten all about it. He had had a busy, harassing day, he said. He was awfully sorry, and he would be sure to remember to-morrow.

Now, she had particularly wanted the paper that very day, but what upset her most was, not so much the want of the paper, as the fact that he should have forgotten to fulfil a wish of hers.

His business worries had, for the time, obliterated the remembrance of her! The thought was unendurable. She had told him so, and that is how the squabble had begun.

The ladybird had by this time reached the rim of George's coat collar.

Well, certainly, he had been looking rather worried lately. Perhaps it *was* a little unfair to expect him to devote his entire thoughts to her and her wishes.

She began to remember a hundred petty tyrannies which she had exercised and to which he had submitted patiently. Harmless little tyrannies, most of them, but quite unnecessary too. Tyrannies she had practised simply because she loved to see him at her feet.

She remembered reading somewhere once that the true secret of married happiness was the principle of "give and take."

The woman, as well as the man, must be prepared to give and take. Up to the present, *he* had done all the giving, she all the taking.

How blind, how selfish she had been!

She saw it all now.

Why, why should the man be always on his knees to the woman? Why should *she* be the queen, and *he* the slave? She had never questioned her right until now, and now she could find no reasonable title to the claim.

Surely the woman who loves her husband should be as ready to serve as to be served. There could be no question of commanding or obeying on either side.

The ladybird was balancing itself in a reckless manner on the edge of George's white collar. If he moved his head ever so slightly, the tiny thing would inevitably be crushed.

In the midst of her remorse, she was seized with a sudden solicitude for the ladybird.

Stepping up behind George, she flicked it lightly and dexterously from his collar.

He felt the gentle touch, and turned his head in surprise.

The next moment, a pair of soft arms were flung about his neck, a hot cheek laid caressingly against his own.

"George, I want to make it up," she whispered, "and—and there's such a lot I want to say to you."

When she had said it, with her pretty head very close to his, he turned to her with a glad smile.

"I'm the proudest, happiest man in the world to-day," he said. "I didn't realise, until this moment, what a sensible little woman I had married. Don't think, dearest," he added, hastily, "that I ever regretted the vows I made to you when I asked you to be my wife. There is nothing I wouldn't willingly do for you. It was only when I found that my love was in danger of spoiling you that I began to resent the—the——"

"The horrible tyrannies I practised upon you," she interrupted quickly. "George, what a selfish little wretch I've been!"

Grete Hahn.

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Telling the Sad Ending to a Flirt s Proposals.

JACK EDSON was a male flirt. There wasn't a girl in the town who hadn't received attentions from him, and just those attentions which, when a young lady receives them from a young gentleman, are generally considered to "mean something."

But the girls—or all of them but one, at least—found out that such attentions, when they came from Jack Edson, instead of "meaning something," meant precisely nothing at all.

Lucy Brown didn't believe that all Jack's pretty speeches and fine compliments meant nothing. He had walked with her more than with any girl in the town, and she had begun to think a good deal of him. He was so devoted and kind, that she had faith in him.

"Better be careful," said Mary Spooner warningly. "He's the biggest flirt in Christendom. He doesn't mean half what he says."

"I don't believe all I hear about him," said Lucy stoutly. "He's not a flirt."

"Yes, he is!" said Mary, in a tone that indicated that no arguments would change her opinion on the subject. "Isn't he always paying attention to every girl that comes along, Lucy? Isn't he always ready to make love to a new face? You know he is."

"No, I don't know any such thing," asserted Lucy. "He is gentle and polite, and if the girls will insist on taking the attentions which are prompted by politeness for attentions of another nature, he isn't to blame, is he?"

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mary, in disgust. "Talk to me about its all being prompted by Jack Edson's politeness! Humph!" and Miss Spooner gave her nose an upward turn, thereby expressing her opinion of Lucy's argument, if not adding very much to her beauty.

When Jack went up to London to live, he kissed Lucy after a very lover-like fashion, and made her promise to write often, which Lucy, putting implicit faith in him, was quite ready to do.

She couldn't help feeling a little disappointed to think that he hadn't said anything more definite. He had known her a year, but never had said a word about marriage in all that time; and if he hadn't the idea of marriage in his head, why had he been so devoted and lover-like?

"Perhaps he wants to get started in business before he settles down," thought Lucy, and that thought comforted her.

Jack hadn't been in London a week before he struck up an acquaintance with Miss Grant.

Miss Grant was tolerably good-looking and had a rich father.

Jack began to be serious in his attentions at once. Those attentions Miss Grant received cordially.

"Business is business," thought Jack. "A few thousands won't come amiss to me, and if I can get a good wife and a snug bank account at the same time, I ought to think myself lucky. I say, Jack Edson, old fellow, go in and win!"

And Jack Edson did "go in" accordingly, and for a month devoted himself wholly and unreservedly to Miss Grant.

Then Fate, or accident, or some other means, thro whim into a dilemma by getting him acquainted with Bella Graham.

Miss Bella Graham was a very pretty young lady, with bold black eyes and a mischief-loving disposition, and as Jack had not flirted for some time, he proceeded, after his old fashion, to lay his heart at Miss Graham's feet, metaphorically speaking, and for a month was her most devoted cavalier.

Miss Graham liked a flirtation as well as Jack did, and was nowise backward in playing her part.

Jack was always looking for and expecting sincerity in others, and concluded at once that Miss Graham had found his fascination irresistible, and was ready to capitulate and surrender, whenever he chose to speak the word.

By and by Miss Graham went out of town on a visit, and then he packed up his devotions and the other necessaries to love-making and returned, like a prodigal son, to Miss Grant.

He had been so busy! Work had been unusually pressing for the last month. He couldn't get away from the office. Jack invented a score of excuses to account for his absence, and Miss Grant graciously accepted them all, and reinstated Jack in her good graces, and "Richard was himself again."

In August, Miss Grant went out of town, and Jack had a lonely time of it for want of someone to pay attention to. While she was gone, he thought over the matter seriously.

Here he was, young, good-looking, and earning a good salary, but in need of a home. The first step towards securing a home was to secure a wife. Why didn't he get married? Sure enough, why didn't he?

The more he thought of it, the more firmly he made up his mind to take the decisive step, and accordingly he cast about in his mind as to whom he should honour by giving the privilege of becoming Mrs. Jack Edson.

Jack knew of three who would be glad to have him—Miss Grant, Miss Graham, and Lucy Brown. All he had to do to get one of them to be his, "for better, for worse," was to give them half a chance to say "Yes."

"I like Lucy," he soliloquised, "but she's a plain little country girl, and her father isn't worth much, and I don't think I'll throw myself away on her. There's Miss Graham; she's smart and handsome, and her father's worth a great deal; but she's got too much temper for me. I'm afraid I don't want one of those high-flyers! Miss Grant's the most desirable person of all. Old Grant's bank account is one very satisfactory feature about the transaction. When she gets back I'll speak to her about it, and have the thing off my mind."

Miss Grant came back the next week, and Jack wended his way to her home shortly after her return, to inform her of the decision he had arrived at during her absence.

Miss Grant was rather cool.

"She's piqued to think I haven't spoken on the important subject before," thought Jack.

A good opportunity presented itself, and Jack proceeded to offer his heart and hand to Miss Grant after the most genteel manner possible.

He expected to see her burst into a flood of thankful tears, or perform some other equally original feat to demonstrate the gladness of her emotions; but she did not do anything of the kind.

"You do me a great deal of honour, I suppose," said she, in a tone which seemed to imply that she hardly considered that she was speaking truthfully. "But I don't feel like accepting it. I would refer you to Miss Graham."

Jack was thunderstruck.

He had never dreamt of anything like this. It embarrassed him terribly for a minute or two. Then he rallied and tried to explain matters; but Miss Grant was as obstinate as a woman ever was, and would not listen to a word from him.

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"Go to Miss Graham," was all she said, and Jack at last withdrew from the field discomfited.

"It's plain as the nose on my face that she's heard something about my flirting with Miss Graham, and she's upset about it. Confound Miss Graham!"

But after sober second thought on the matter, he concluded to accept Miss Grant's advice and go to Miss Graham.

Accordingly he set off to inform Miss Graham that he had concluded to marry her.

Miss Graham was all smiles and pretty words, and Jack felt that he had but to say the word and the thing was settled.

And by and by he proceeded to inform her of the honour he had decided to confer upon her.

"Marry you?" exclaimed Miss Graham. "Why, I couldn't think of such a thing!" And she laughed as if it was the best joke she had ever heard.

Jack began to feel scared.

"Why not?" demanded he.

"Because I'm engaged to one man already, and the law objects to our marrying two, you know!" And thereupon Miss Graham laughed again, as if it were immensely funny.

For the life of him, Jack could not see the point.

"How long have you been engaged?" stammered Jack, feeling cold and hot all over.

"For as much as—let me see"—coolly—"as much as a year, I fancy. Yes, it was in October that it happened. Just about a year ago."

"And you never told me!" groaned Jack.

"You never asked me," said Miss Graham.

Poor Jack! He gathered up his lacerated heart and withdrew from his second battlefield, completely routed.

"I won't give it up!" he decided. "There's Lucy Brown. She'll have me, and jump at the chance, and she's worth forty Miss Grants and a trainload of Miss Grahams! I'll write to her and ask her this very afternoon."

And write to her he did.

He had not answered her last letter, received three months before, but he put in a page of excuses for his negligence, and smoothed the matter over to his satisfaction, if not to Lucy's.

The letter was sent, and he awaited a reply with considerable anxiety.

At last it came.

"It's favourable, of course!" he said, as he tore open the letter. "Lucy always thought the world of me."

But his opinion as to its being favourable changed somewhat as he read it:

"Mr. Jack Edson,—I am very thankful for the honour, etc., but I'd rather not have second-hand articles when I can get them at first hand. John Smith says: 'Tell him I have something to say about it now, and I'm not going to forego my claim on Lucy Brown for all the Jack Edson's in the world; and it isn't quite the correct thing to propose to other men's wives.'

"Love to Miss Grant; also to Miss Graham.

"Yours, Lucy Brown Smith."

"Good gracious! Lucy married!"

Jack's eyes were like saucers when he read that name.

Then he suddenly dropped into the nearest chair.

"Well, I've gone and done it this time!" he groaned. "Jack Edson, you're a fool!"

Poor Jack! He's in the market yet! Who bids?

Ted Lane.

"You're not in love, Bobbie. You only think you are." "Well, how the dickens am I to find out my mistake if I'm mistaken?" "Oh, marry the young woman, by all means."

Fred: "How are you getting on with Miss Angell? Did you speak to her father as you determined?" Frank: "Yes." Fred: "And what happened?" Frank: "I said to him, 'Mr. Angell, I love your daughter.' Said he, 'So do I; now let's talk about something else.'"

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his prophecies for this week's birthdays.

August 5.—This will be an unfavourable year for business to those whose birthdays occur to-day. Do not lend to friends or loss will result.

Single girls will find love affairs interesting, but unexpected events appear to hinder matters. Put little faith in promises.

A child born to-day will be sharp and clever; not fortunate in a business of its own. If a girl, she will not marry well.

August 6.—A good year for to-day's birthdays. Favourable for farmers, aged persons, lovers, and those in employ. Voyages and long journeys should not be undertaken.

Young people born in the early morning marry. To those born later, there is danger of crosses and intrigues.

A child born to-day will be abrupt, affectionate, and thoughtful. Can go into business for itself and be fortunate. Not so good for a girl.

August 7.—Not a good year for marriage or love affairs to those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Those born in the evening will have cause for jealousy. Girls born then meet with deceit.

Let others make the first move up till noon, and even then it will be wise to go quiet. Better to sell than buy.

A child born to-day will have a quiet life. Will be rather extravagant and fond of change.

August 8.—A fortunate year for business and employ for to-day's children. Have a care with papers and agreements. Some danger of quarrels and law.

Young girls will quarrel with lovers, and need caution in what they say and write.

A child born to-day will get on in life. Will be active, clever, and ambitious, but will possess a quick temper.

August 9.—A changeable year. Some sickness in domestic circle may be expected by those whose birthdays fall on this day.

Some disappointment comes into love affairs. Young girls must be cautious; guard against intrigues, and attentions from married men.

A child born to-day will not be fortunate, and should keep in employ. If a girl, danger of disgrace and an unhappy marriage.

August 10.—An active year with many changes. Avoid speculation and lending money. Some anxiety over wills or insurance.

Love affairs are unimportant. Girls born near 9 p.m. must have a care; much deceit and little confidence should be placed in opposite sex.

A child born to-day will be active, improvident, and fond of change. Should be in employ of others, as good fortune is not promised.

August 11.—Care will be needed this year with money and business, by those who celebrate their birthdays, to-day.

Young people will be favoured in their love affairs, though girls born early in the morning will be in danger of some deception.

A child born to-day will be rather fortunate in life. Possess a cheerful disposition, be studious, and have good business abilities.

Asturel.

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Passing the Love of Women.

By Gertrude Page.

Author of "Dearer Than Life," "Maurice Dale's Love Story," &c., &c.

When the firm told Tom Earle to go to Vienna, Tom told the firm to go considerably further, but that, of course, was under his breath.

"I shouldn't mind so much if I could get back by Easter," he grumbled to his friend, Dick Davis, "but it's a beastly shame to send a chap off now. The work could very well wait for another two weeks. If I have to spend the Easter holiday out there I shall swear like a medical student for two solid hours."

Davis looked amused.

"Rough on poor Maisie, too," he said slyly.

Tom did not reply for a moment, but kicked an unoffending hassock half across the room.

"It'll give Haslem all the running," he said at last, disconsolately.

"A good thing too," was the unsympathetic rejoinder.

Tom took it very well.

"You're always unfair to Maisie," he said. "It isn't her fault if the chaps all run after her."

"Oh, no, not at all. Still, I'll lay a wager she doesn't object."

"A girl can't help being pretty. You wouldn't have her tie her face up in a bag, I suppose."

"No, but I'd have her keep her eyes a little more for you, if you really are to be the one and only."

Tom turned angrily, but meeting his friend's frank blue eyes only said, with a shrug of his shoulders—"I'd knock you down for that, Dick, if you weren't such a thundering good chap."

Dick made no reply, but looked at his friend a little wistfully. He was a good deal fonder of him than he would have dreamt of owning, and he did not want him to marry Maisie Travers. As things stood at present, however, it seemed more than likely that he would do so, unless his eyes were opened in time, or Maisie landed a bigger fish.

"I expect there'll be about three feet of snow," said Tom, returning to the first subject, "to add to the delights of Austria, "and it's as likely as not I shall get lost on the way, and never be heard of any more."

"I'll come and look for you," said Dick, "and I'll find you or die in the attempt."

"If you'd go instead of me, there'd be some sense in it."

"I shouldn't mind at all if it were possible. Having no Maisie, you see, Vienna has considerable charm for me."

The following day they had dinner at Gatti's together, with a view to sending Tom off in better spirits, but the attempt was not attended by any brilliant success.

"I suppose you saw Miss Travers last night," Dick said at last, to try and draw Tom.

"Yes. She's awfully sick about Easter. They are giving a dance, you know, and she won't like it if I don't get back in time."

There was a pause, then Tom remarked suddenly—"I say, Dick, old chap, you might do a fellow a good turn."

"Well?" said Dick, "Say on."

"It's just this way, you see," continued Tom, playing with some crumbs, "What riles me as much as anything is the idea of Haslem having it all his own way, such a bounder as he is, too. Now, if you wouldn't mind just cutting him out for that one evening, I should be so awfully glad about it."

"But, my dear chap—" began Dick expressively.

"Yes, I know," interposed Tom, "but Maisie doesn't really care a fig for him, and knowing you were my special chum, she'd like several dances with you. She's a thundering good waltzer, so you wouldn't be making a martyr of yourself at all."

"But what if I have a special friend there of my own?"

Tom looked up amused, for the idea of Dick Davis with a special friend was decidedly a novelty, he being notedly averse to ladies' society.

"Anything in the wind?" he asked.

"No, old chap. I'll be a cat's paw if you like. As you say, Haslem is an awful bounder, and it would be a bit of sport to worry him."

"Beastly nuisance!" he ejaculated to himself later, after seeing Tom into the train. "If there's a girl I detest—Ah, well, so long as she doesn't attempt to get up a flirtation with me afterwards I suppose I needn't mind!" but it was with rather a gloomy face he turned into his club.

Meanwhile, both looking and feeling extremely sorry for himself, Tom embarked at Dover upon the steamer for Ostend, and after a bad crossing, arrived in a somewhat pitiable condition on the opposite shore. He knew little French and less German, and he began to wonder if he would ever get to Vienna at all, or anywhere else for the matter of that. He felt fairly secure about getting as far as Cologne, because he was in a railway carriage bearing that name as a destination, though that in itself was no certainty, as many a stranger to London can testify after getting into a 'bus labelled Charing Cross and finding it was going in the opposite direction. However, Tom made himself as comfortable as he could, and hoped for the best. But the Fates were not kind, indeed, much the reverse, for though he got to Cologne safely enough, he steamed away again, later on, in the wrong train. It would hardly be correct to say he was in blissful ignorance of this, for any semblance of bliss seemed distant enough just then. Things had not gone smoothly at Cologne at all, and it had been with a scowling brow, muttering imprecations upon the German nation in general, that he had fled in the middle of a much needed meal and jumped into the wrong train. He discovered his mistake on Sunday morning, when the train came to a standstill somewhere in the wilds of the Rhine country. His feelings then being altogether beyond expression, he relapsed into an ominous silence, threw down his portmanteau with a suggestive thud, and went to get some breakfast looking rather like a death's head at a feast.

While stolidly attending thus to the "inner man," he

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became aware of the fact that his "outer man" was apparently of some interest to a bright-eyed English girl at the next table. Several times when he looked up he met her eyes, and though she turned away at once he could not help feeling she was watching him. When he had finished his breakfast he tried to discover from the waiter how he was to get on to the right route again, but without much success. Then suddenly a happy thought struck him—why not appeal to the bright-eyed English girl? She had left the table, and was only just outside, so he went up to her, and raising his hat, said—"I beg your pardon, but I am hopelessly lost; I wonder if you would mind helping me?"

"I will do my best," she said at once, with a frank smile, "Where do you want to go?"

"I am on my way to Vienna, but I got into the wrong train at Cologne. I have no idea where I am now."

She looked amused.

"You are rather a long distance out of your way," she said, "However did you manage to get here?"

"I got into a Rhine train at Cologne, which was what I thought I was told to do."

"Then you must have got into one going the wrong side of the Rhine. Yes, of course, that's what you've done. You've been travelling all night down the wrong side of the Rhine."

"Must I go all the way back then?" he asked disconsolately.

"No. Your best plan will be to come to Frankfort and get into the Train de Luxe. I am going to Vienna myself, and that is what I am going to do. It is a first class train, but you will find it is well worth the extra money."

Tom looked up quite cheerfully. "Expense is no object now," he said. "I must get to Vienna by to-morrow if I have to have a special train. It serves the firm right for sending me, when any other chap would have done."

"Oh, you will like Vienna," she told him. "It is a magnificent city. I have been studying music in Germany, and now I am going to Vienna to stay with an aunt for a few weeks, and I expect to have a grand time."

Half an hour later they started off together, and Tom's views on continental travelling modified considerably as they went along. Indeed, Helen Hamiltonp roved such a charming companion that in the end he began to think regretfully of what he had the previous day longed for before all things, the termination of his journey. When it came, however, he was much gratified by an invitation to call at the aunt's; still more so by his reception when he made the call. Miss Foster was one of the old maids whom everybody loves, and being fonder of young people than anything else in the world, she welcomed Tom most cordially, and bade him come to see them as often as he liked. In consequence he went a great deal, and the subsequent discovery that he must remain over Easter was far less terrible than he had imagined.

Not so for poor Dick, however.

When he had asked Maisie for four dances, and had been given them with a good deal of gush that was abhorrent to his soul, he felt the ties of friendship could expect no more.

"I suppose you are secretly in mourning to-night?" he said to her during their first rest. "It is very hard lines Tom could not get back."

"Oh, I love dancing!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Of course, if it had been anything else——. And then you are such a charming substitute, Mr. Davis"—with a little more gush—"really, Tom is rather rash."

Dick knit his eyebrows and stared straight before him, and his thoughts ran away to a bonny English girl he had met on the Calais steamer crossing to the Continent last autumn, and who constituted in ignorance the untold romance of his life. A sudden storm had come up with great violence, causing the machinery to get disabled, and they had had a very bad three hours' experience. He did not know who the girl was, but he and she together had tried to look after some of the passengers, who were not blessed with so good a nerve as they, and ever since she had been the secret heroine of his dreams. And this meant all the more in Dick's case, because there had never been any heroine before. He was what is known as not a marrying man, and the designation pleased him. Yet he knew that if he ever met his friend of the Calais steamer again, he would be her slave. Indeed, he was almost that now, for by night or day, whenever he allowed himself the leisure to dream, she immediately became the chief object of his thoughts—and he loved her in a quiet way that was in itself a prayer for her return. And Maisie was so different. The wideness of the comparison made her all the more distasteful to him, and her persistent flattery the more obnoxious. Tom was such a good fellow, he could not understand at all what charm she could possibly have for him. If this Vienna trip ended in freeing him from her influence Dick felt he would be more glad than he could say.

Meanwhile Tom and Helen Hamilton fast became great friends, and for Tom at least, England grew a little less desirable, and Vienna a little more so every day.

Then came the picnic in the mountains and the climb in the afternoon, followed by a sudden mountain mist, and two young travellers were lost together this time, both in equal trouble.

Tom did everything he could think of to take care of her, but they had got up to the snow line, and he was far more concerned than he liked to show. Helen, with her usual pluck, laughed at their misfortune, and showed a brave face all the time, until she began to feel the bitter cold, and then, though she looked just as hopeful, she grew very quiet. If was impossible to make any progress in the mist, for a single false step might have been their death, so Tom found a small, cave-like hollow, and taking off his coat insisted upon wrapping it round her, in spite of her violent protests.

"I will not allow it," she said at last resolutely, "unless you share it also. We are lost for the present, you and I," looking with her clear, frank eyes, straight into his, "we must forget everything else until we are in safety, and just take care of each other the best way we can, like two children."

He understood her, and with a simplicity as genuine as her own, crouched down beside her for life and warmth. But he was less strong constitutionally, and presently she discovered with horror that he was growing numb with cold. He seemed almost stupefied by it, and unable to speak to her coherently. She took a few steps to try and penetrate through the mist, but returned baffled in every direction. So there was only one thing left, and with a little gulp in her throat, she folded her arms round him and pressed close to keep him alive.

When the mist rose again she was still holding him, and Tom, with returning warmth, lay still in great content.

That night there were two troubled, anxious hearts in Vienna. Helen sat a long time at her window and looked at the stars fixedly, thinking—thinking—thinking. For though he had made no confession, she knew that Tom Earle loved her, and her heart had no answer ready.

"It is not likely I shall ever see *him* again," she mused, with a sudden, swift sadness in her face. "Chance threw us together that once, but tore us apart again immediately, still nameless and unknown to one another. Yet how he looked at me—Shall I ever forget it? Has he forgotten already?

"Ah, but how absurd to care for a man met in such a way, and known so slightly! I am surprised at *you*, Helen Gordon Hamilton, with your strength of mind and purpose!

"Only he was so different from other men—he looked so different.

"And then he changed so, even in that little while. At first he was just callous and a little cynical, even while help-

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ing everyone—I think he must dislike women. And then afterwards he was so changed. It seemed that he must have liked me."

She got up and walked restlessly about the room.

"Only how can we ever meet again?" she urged. "How is it possible seeing we know nothing of each other—nothing at all—not even our names.

"And then Mr. Earle is such a good fellow—if it had not been for that other, how easily I could have loved him. Why, oh, why, do I remember?"

And Tom Earle smoked a last cigar on the verandah of his hotel at a late hour, strolling up and down with a troubled face. "I can't desert Maisie," he said over and over. "I don't know that she cares much, but I can't desert her without being sure."

"There has never been any engagement," said his heart, "You are perfectly free."

"No, no," answered his better nature. "It was understood to be only your position that barred an engagement. It is the same thing really, only if anything more binding because she trusts to your honour."

"I suppose I must wait," he finished, "and hope. I was fond of Maisie, but I did not love her. I did not know what love was until I met Helen Hamilton."

Three days later, in a letter couched in delicate terms from Dick Davis, he learnt that Maisie had been faithless. "They say the chap has ten thousand a year," he wrote. "I hope you won't take it to heart much. She could never have been true, for she had not got it in her."

That evening Tom and Helen stood under the stars and plighted troth together.

* * * * *

Helen had heard so much from Tom of his great friend Dick Davis, that she looked forward quite eagerly to meeting him at the Tennis Club Dance.

"He is a ripping waltzer," Tom had said, "And he will want several with you, because of all he has heard about you."

"Poor man!" she laughed. "I am afraid there is a sad disappointment in store for him, if he has been foolish enough to believe all you have told him."

But she forgot everything when they stood face to face, except a certain Calais steamer and a sudden storm.

"This is Dick," she heard Tom say in a dazed way, and then she gave a little gasp, and the room reeled somewhat, and she held out her hand wondering if she were in a dream, or if it were all real.

Then she noted a sudden sternness in the man's eyes before her, and about his mouth, and she knew that he gripped her hand until it hurt because of some deep emotion.

She waited for him to acknowledge their acquaintance, but he made no sign of doing so, and hardly knowing why, she took her cue from him.

"May I have some dances?" he said simply, and took her programme.

"Have as many as you like, old chap!" laughed Tom happily, "I can afford to be magnanimous to such a friend as you."

Later on they danced together, and still he made no sign.

At last, when the evening was nearly over, they stood alone in a small conservatory.

"You have not forgotten?" he said, and she felt his eyes were looking through into her soul.

"No, I have not forgotten," she replied, struggling to speak with perfect naturalness. "Why did you not mention it before?"

"Because I could not," a little brusquely.

"Why?" Helen stood squarely before him, with her small head thrown back slightly—and clear eyes looked into clear eyes with understanding.

Dick had not intended to give any explanation at all, but now they stood face to face like this, he saw that in her eyes which told him he could trust her.

And his heart so longed to tell her all—was there not pain enough without the added bitterness of silence?"

"I did not mention it because it must cease to be," he told her slowly, "that is, it must cease to be for me."

She waited, and presently, after taking a turn down the conservatory and coming back to her, he said—"In anything that moves me deeply, I am very direct, forgive me if I am over blunt now. Ever since we parted on the Calais Pier I have loved you, and dreamt of meeting you again. It is not easy for me to love, women have never appealed to me, and just as there was never anyone before, so there will never be anyone again. I have known this all along, and waited, praying that you might come.

"Sometimes I hoped, and then at others I was afraid to—it seemed too great a thing to expect. That what has, could happen, never crossed my mind. I may not ask you the question I meant to ask you if I ever met you again, but I cannot think you are quite indifferent since our meeting to-night. What I ask instead is—*Never let him know.*"

She had grown white to the lips, and now she made no answer.

"I shall go away," he said very quietly, "out of the country altogether, and I leave my secret in your hands. I know you will not betray me. It would spoil all his life to know the truth. We love each other, Tom and I—We don't say much, but it is there, 'passing the love of women'! Do not let him know we had ever met—forget if you can we ever did."

And still the girl stood white and silent, making no sign.

"I cannot help being glad you had not forgotten me," he said. "I shall take that thought away with me to the other side of the world, as my best possession."

Then she held out her hands suddenly—

"I love you," she cried brokenly, "Oh, I love you!"

He bit his lip and stood silently wrestling with himself. Then he raised her hand and bending down kissed it reverently.

"Thank you," he said, "God bless you for that. Only it cannot be. I would rather die than take his happiness. For my sake give him all, and be always just what you would had we never met. If you will promise me this, you will take half of the bitterness out of the future for me."

"I will try," she breathed, "for your sake."

Then he turned hurriedly and left her.

* * * * *

There was a good deal of surmise on Helen Hamilton's wedding-day, as to the deathly whiteness of her face. No one had ever known her to be nervous, so it did not seem possible it could be that, yet her voice faltered strangely over the vows. Afterwards, in spite of much persuasion, she and her husband drove straight to the railway station, and later on came home from the wedding-trip without saying a word to anyone.

And in the five years that followed, though she lost none of her actual charm, she never unbent to make a great friend again, and this also was the subject of much surmise.

Then her husband died, and as soon as it was possible, she went away quietly alone without seeing anyone.

But there was most surmise of all when it leaked out a year later that she was going to be married to someone from over the sea. At first it had been generally supposed that she was broken-hearted, and much sympathy had been expended upon her. When it was known, however, that she was to be married again, the sympathisers were not so pleased as might have been expected. To be broken-hearted was one thing—to be consoled by a second husband quite another. Everyone, however, scented a romance in the background, and made strenuous efforts to find it out. But they were baffled on every side, and finally gave it up.

And there was no one in the big, gloomy, London church the day Helen Earle was married to Dick Davis. Even the passers-by did not think it worth while to waste a second on them, since there were neither carriages nor horses, nor any paraphernalia whatever.

Yet it is generally such weddings that have the true spark of interest in them, and just that element of the ideal which is what we would fain look for at the hymeneal altar above everywhere else.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

MRS. NORTON RAISES £5,000.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard. On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind. Mrs. Norton and Cynthia go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices Cynthia to bet heavily, by which she loses £800.

WE were a very silent party coming home from the Derby. Even Frankie's spirits flagged; she had lost heavily, and the thought of her bets, plus Clairette's cheque, that somehow or other would have to be met on the morrow, weighed on her mind.

As for me, I was too wretched to think. I sat crushed by the consciousness that I owed eight hundred pounds, and had not as many shillings!

When we arrived at Pont Street, Frankie suggested that the rest of the party should come in to supper; they were all too tired—or cross—to accept, however, except Toby Ffolliot, who eagerly grasped at the invitation.

Lady Gaveston had long since retired to rest—somehow one could not say "gone to bed" when speaking of Milady—and Frankie ordered supper in the morning room.

It was a cosy little place, with low, soft-cushioned chairs, and rose-coloured draperies, and a general air of luxury. The decoration was Frankie's special fad, and consisted of shoes. Shoes of all sorts, sizes and descriptions twinkled at you from the walls, pointed their toes upon the mantelpiece, danced wickedly on the shelves of a giant Japanese cabinet. Dainty *pantofles* in blue velvet embroidered with pearls, coquettish *pompadours* with red heels and diamond buckles, thin Moorish slippers, a tiny pair of sabots, Canadian snow shoes, and Indian mocassins.

Every woman in the smart set was bound to cultivate a fad for *something*; it might be animal, vegetable, or the other thing, but it must be original.

Lady Wetherall, for instance, had a unique collection of snails. They lived in a crystal tank, and were white and black, and pearly green. Mrs. Curtis-Blount went in for metal curios, and boasted a number of ancient pots and pans in iron and copper, and a few modern "gods" in gold and

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silver. One couldn't hope to be even faintly smart without a fad. Snails and saucepans I thought rather slow, but I was enthusiastic over Frankie's shoes. They were all pretty, and some of them had histories.

Leaving Toby in the morning-room, my cousin went upstairs to change her frock for a tea-gown. I followed, misery at my heart.

"If you don't mind, Frankie," I said, "I won't come down again. I want to go to bed."

"What's the matter?" she asked sharply. "You look positively wretched."

"It's nothing to what I feel. Oh, Frankie, what am I to do? I owe eight hundred pounds."

She turned round and gazed at me. Her hair was loose on her shoulders; in her soft white draperies she looked wonderfully young, and very lovely.

"Tell me all about it," she said kindly, but an odd smile twitched at the corners of her mouth, and her eyes danced with mischief.

She heard me out in silence, fixing her hair the while.

"You've got yourself in a nice mess," she remarked. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, Frankie, won't you help me?" I said earnestly.

"My dear child, I'm stony broke myself. Still, we must manage it somehow, I suppose. You'd better speak to Fluffy and see what he can do. What a cat dear Vi is, to be sure."

"I'm certain she let me in for those bets hoping I should lose. Does she dislike me, Frankie?"

"Dislike is a mild word, my dear. If there's a person on this earth whom Mrs. Blount would cheerfully roast to death, it's you."

"But why? What have I done to her?"

"The worst possible injury; you have superseded her in a man's admiration—affection doesn't count nowadays. Don't look so innocent, Cynthia, it annoys me. You must know what I mean. Chesterton, my dear, Chesterton's the man. He and Algy Tresham were dear Vi's special property up to last Christmas, then his lordship grew restive. In other words, Vi was too exacting, and Chesterton retired to the Rockies to shoot big game. He has only just come back, and showed signs, I am told, of a reviving interest in dear Vi until—he saw you. Since then he has pointedly and painfully ignored the lady, who is naturally indignant with you as the cause of his indifference. Now, she knows that Chesterton hates a young girl to go the pace, though he's not particular about married women, and her game is to make him think you a forward and frivolous young person. To that end she inveigled you into making these preposterous bets. All things considered, I must confess dear Vi has scored. Whether she will win all along the line depends on you."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Curtis Blount *cares* for Lord Chesterton, is—is—in love with him?" I gasped.

"My dear Cynthia, we don't use such expressions in Society. Chesterton and Vi were very good friends—until you appeared."

"But Frankie, Mrs. Blount is married, her husband——"

"Is in South Africa, so he doesn't count," interrupted my cousin. "Besides, poor Teddy Blount knows his part to perfection. You and Vi are rivals, Cynthia, but"—she used—"unless you play into her hands, I'll put my money on you."

"I don't care a scrap about Lord Chesterton," I cried indignantly.

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"You always were a fool," she observed politely. "However, we have talked enough about your affairs, I've my own to think about. We must go down to supper. Toby is hungry, and as he's got to help me raise some money he mustn't be kept waiting. Come, Cynthia, don't look so glum, we'll talk about your debts to-morrow."

It was difficult to suppose the impecunious Toby could help anyone to raise money—he certainly had none of his own. However, I held my peace on that score, and followed Frankie, slim and girlish in her white satin, amber roses at her throat and in her hair.

Supper that night was a great success; never had I seen Frankie so light-hearted or so gay. She told smart stories that sent Toby into peals of laughter, imitated distinguished people, their gestures, and their tricks of manner, till I forgot my troubles and felt light-hearted too. We had lobster salad, cold chicken and strawberry ice, and lots of champagne—I was beginning to quite like champagne.

Under the influence of Frankie, the supper and the wine, Toby waxed eloquent. He lost his shyness, said some amazingly brilliant things, thought others even more brilliant, and made a desperate though futile effort to look fascinating.

Supper over, Frankie lit a cigarette and made room for Toby beside her on a lounge. I sat in a rocking chair by the window. I felt tired, not to say sleepy. The room was heavy with the scent of flowers—roses, roses, everywhere—and the light from the shaded lamps was soft and pink.

I leant back and closed my eyes. All the happenings of that eventful day passed through my mind in a strange medley. Lord Chesterton, Mrs. Blount, Clairette and Toby danced before me in sabots, high-heeled Pompadours, or Moorish slippers. Of a sudden Mrs. Blount took off her shoes and threw them at me sharply. I started—wideawake in a second.

It was not, all things considered, an opportune time for me to awake. Toby—poor foolish Toby—was stammering out a declaration of his love for Frankie. It made me impatient and irritable to listen. I wished my cousin would arrange not to receive proposals in my presence. One feels so horribly *de trop* on such occasions. It was no good for me to attempt to escape, however, Frankie would not have asked me down to supper had she not intended me to stay, no matter what occurred. There was nothing before me to do but grin and bear it.

"You won't mind my telling you, Frankie?" said Toby. "Of course, it's nothing to you. I daresay you are bored at hearing it. But—but—" he grew white and caught his breath. "I love you," he said hoarsely. "Yes, I love you."

An easy smile came to my cousin's lips, she leant towards him, her fingers rested lightly on his arm, the scent of her hair thrilled him.

Toby clenched his hands and tried not to look at her. He was a nice boy, as I have said, and his reverence for Frankie was a thing to marvel at. He would not so much as touch her gown unless she willed it.

Smiling she moved nearer. Her face was close to his.

"And are you sorry that you love me?" she said softly.

He stared at her then, and the light on his face was good to see—there came a flash of comprehension. He rose, and with a little laugh, tender yet exultant, took her in his arms.

She let him kiss her, heard his protestations, ardent, simple, strong, listened to his endearments fresh and sweet as young love alone can be—and still she smiled.

"You are all alike," she said at last. "Ready to swear any and everything. But when it comes to proving your words!"

"I only wish there was a way for me to prove the truth of what I say," he interrupted. "I long to do something. Can't you think of anything you want, Frankie?"

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"I want lots of things, dear boy; most you couldn't get for me, one you might, but——" she paused.

"Tell me, and if it's humanly possible you shall have it."

She laughed and laid her head upon his shoulder.

"I want five thousand pounds," she said softly, "and I want it by to-morrow. That is, of course, the difficulty, otherwise I could sell out some securities, get an advance from my trustees, or a hundred other things. As it is, I have to make a payment—bets, you know, can't wait—and unless I have the money——" She let her hands fall with an expressive gesture. "You'll help me, Toby, won't you?"

"On my soul, Frankie, I couldn't lay my hands on £20. My salary is mortgaged six months ahead, and my uncle would not advance a penny of the allowance he makes me."

"I didn't suppose you had the money," said Frankie. "But"—she looked hard at him—"there are such things as money-lenders, you know. Nathan will let me have £5,000 on my own and another's security. Will you"—she looked meaningly at Toby—"supply that other?"

"I? Why, Frankie, no money-lender in London would take me as security for £5,000. You see, I'm not sure of inheriting my uncle's money. I'm bound to come in for the title, but that's about all. Sir Edward can leave his fortune as he chooses. There's no chance of raising any money on my expectations."

"It's the mere matter of a name that is wanted," said Frankie. "Look"—she took a paper from a table at her side—"this is the bill. As you see, I have put my signature. Another name under mine and I should have £5,000. The bill will not fall due for three months, by that time I shall be able to pay it three times over. You see"—she paused, fixing her eyes on Toby—"it is only a signature we want—nothing else."

"If you think mine is any good at all," said the boy in a bewildered fashion, "I'll sign like a rocket, but I'm sure Nathan won't take it."

"Can you think of anything else?"

"Chesterton would back a bill for me, or Kinross. I'll ask them, if you like, they wouldn't know it was for you."

"You evidently don't understand me, Toby. I must have the money by to-morrow, therefore I want the signature to-night. What of your uncle?" she asked abruptly.

"He'd order me out of the house if I were to suggest such a thing. He has a horror of money-lenders. Besides, he's not in England. He left yesterday, for Egypt."

Frankie made no answer. Going to the table she poured out some brandy. She drank it off, then lit a cigarette, and leant against the mantelpiece.

Toby went to her.

"I have vexed you, somehow," he said. "I am stupid, I suppose, and don't understand. What is it—dearest?" He uttered the last word shyly, rapturously. To be able to call the woman he loves "dearest" seems a wonderful thing to a young man, at first. Later it comes to mean something altogether different.

Frankie put down her cigarette and turned quickly. Her face was flushed, her eyes brilliant.

"Not five minutes since you swore you loved me," she cried; "declared there was nothing that you wouldn't do for me. And now, when I take you at your word and ask you for something, you quibble and pretend you do not understand. Listen," she snatched the bill and held it before him. "I want another signature beneath my own, and you must put it there. No, don't ask questions, nor offer explanations—*write!*"—and she thrust a pen into his fingers.

The boy listened with a bewilderment that gradually gave place to a horrified understanding. He threw down the pen, and sinking into a chair hid his face.

In a second Frankie was kneeling at his side.

"It doesn't mean anything dreadful," she whispered. "You've only just to write the name. No one will ever know but you and I. The money will be paid for certain when the bill falls due. Won't you do it for me, Toby? Think what it will mean if you refuse. If I don't get the money to-morrow, I shall be ruined, disgraced——"

"What of me," said the boy in a low voice, "how can I ever hold up my head again if——"

"No one will ever know, dear, but you and I. And we are the only people that matter, so long as we love each other."

"And if I sign—what then?" He raised his head, meeting her eyes. He looked white and drawn, and there were lines about his mouth, lines that, traced by the suffering of the moment, cut deep into the boyish face and left it hard.

"If I do this thing what am I to get?" He grasped her wrist and must have hurt her, for she gave a quick, sharp cry.

"I'll marry you—I swear it," she said quickly.

He caught her to him, kissing her eyes, and mouth and hair, then half staggered to the table and signed for pen and ink.

The lamps were burning dim so that he could not see to write. Frankie drew back the curtains. The dawn was breaking in the city, and the daylight stole into the room, making all things look garish in its clear purity. The greyness of the dawn fell full upon his face; so strange and terrible it looked that with a cry I rushed towards him.

I was too late. Toby had signed his uncle's name!

Another minute he had left the room, and Frankie followed him. I sat and cried, and wished that I and Toby were both dead.

My cousin took a much more cheerful view of the situation.

"You are really too silly, Cynthia," she said, "anyone would think that Toby had committed forgery to see the way you're going on."

"But it is forgery," I protested.

"Not a bit of it. It's forgery if a person signs another's name to get money for himself, not otherwise. You often write letters for me and use my signature, don't you? Well, *that* is not committing forgery, and Toby hasn't either. Besides, the thing's done now. Nobody will be a penny the worse, and I shall be £5,000 richer. I suppose you know that if I did not meet Clairette's cheque to-day, something very unpleasant would happen to me. Just as unpleasant as will happen to you if you don't pay your bets."

"Frankie!"

"Oh, yes, you're very innocent my dear, and very young. All the same, you'll have to pay £800, and unless I can help you I don't know where you'll get it from. And I shan't help you if you are not sensible. Promise me not to say a word of what has happened to any living soul, or I'll turn you over to Mrs. Blount's tender mercies. It's quite possible she may prosecute you, and you might be found guilty of trying to obtain money under false pretences. You know you hadn't a penny when you made the bets. Are you going to promise?"

She stood before me fair and smiling in her rich dress and jewels. What could I do? I was tired, worn out with fatigue and worry, haunted by fears of what might happen to me, weighed down by the thoughts of my debts.

"You are sure Toby won't get into trouble, Frankie?"

"He can't, except through you."

"You'll be able to pay the moneylender?"

"Am I a fool, Cynthia? Of course I shall pay. Come, be sensible and promise."

And too weary to combat further I yielded and gave my word.

I went upstairs and flung

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Confessions of Cynthia.

NEW SERIES OF STORIES.

myself exhausted on the bed. For the first time life looked grey to me. I had no joy in to-day, nor in the thought of to-morrow. Alas, alas, why had I made those bets, the bets that had tied my hands and set a seal upon my tongue? What should I do? How would it all end?

I slept that morning until lunch-time, when Frankie came to see how I was feeling. She had just returned from a drive, and looked deliciously cool in white *crêpe de Chine*, with a great bunch of lilies in her hands.

"Poor child," she said sweetly, "you do look fagged. Cheer up, Cynthia, things are going well with us to-day. I've been to Nathan, and he cashed up at once. Infamous interest he's charged, of course, but any way I've got the five thou. I've paid in two to the bank to meet Clairette's cheque, and distributed the rest between hungry tradesmen and bookmakers. Still I saved enough to buy you this," and she threw a little packet on the bed. I opened it and found a necklace of gold beads exquisitely chased.

"I'm glad you're pleased," she said, "I want you to wear it to-night. I've just seen Lord Chesterton, he brought a note from the Duchess—he's a special favourite of hers—asking you to the ball to-night. Isn't that good news? You'll look sweet, Cynthia, and utterly rout Mrs. Curtis Blount. I've spoken to Clairette about your frock, and as a special favour she will get it done and send it along this afternoon. It is white chiffon over silk, with *motifs* of lace. Aren't you glad?"

"It's nice of the Duchess, Frankie, but——"

"Oh, I won't listen to objections, you're coming, there's an end of it."

"But, Frankie, what about my bets?"

My cousin paused.

"You must see Fluffy," she said, "as soon as possible. By the bye, Cynthia, when you left the convent, did not the sisters hand you over a packet that your father left in their charge. What was in it—letters?"

"No, mining shares, and a few legal papers."

Frankie nodded.

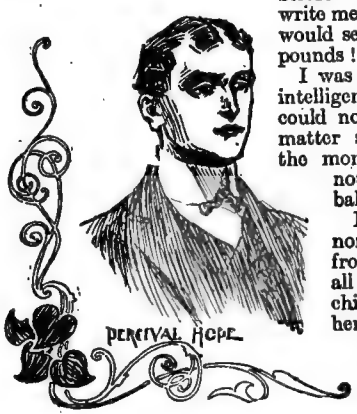
"You must take the shares to Fluffy and ask him to sell them for you."

"You really think they're worth money?"

"Maybe; anyway, Fluffy will tell you. Give me the papers and I'll send them to him at once by special messenger."

I was only too glad to do so. The mere thought that I might be able to pay that terrible eight hundred pounds was joy.

The messenger brought back an unexpected piece of news. Fluffy was leaving London for the Continent quite early the following morning, if possible he'd run up to Pont Street before he started. If not he'd write me. The shares he thought would sell for about a thousand pounds!



I was very delighted at the intelligence, though sorry I could not see him and get the matter settled that day. For the moment, however, I could not help thinking of the ball.

Frankie spared no pains nor expense with my frock. It was very lovely, all shimmering white, soft chiffon draperies caught here and there with bunches of white jasmine, costly lace, fine as a cobweb cunningly draped. I wore the gold beads at my throat, and in my hair was a spray o jasmine.

Frankie looked superb in a marvellous gown of jewelled lace over an underskirt of *eau de nil*; the pattern of the lace, water lilies with their broad flat leaves, was outlined with silk, filled in with pearls, brilliants and tiny emeralds. The jewels flashed at her every movement, opalescent, gleaming, like sunshine on a lake. It was the most magnificent, certainly the most costly gown worn at the ball.

Lady Gaveston, in mauve satin and Irish point, looked severe but unimpeachable. She condescended to express great approbation of my appearance, but warned me against "vanity" and other sins of the flesh.

"Percival Hope may be at the Duchess'," said Frankie to me in the brougham. "Be quite nice to him, Cynthia, just as if nothing had happened. By the bye, I'm going to ask Sir Gregory Stokes to help me about Jim—Ella's sweetheart. Sir Gregory is a general, you know, and a person of immense importance at the War Office. He can get the young man's discharge if he will."

"I'm sure I hope you'll persuade him, Frankie. I'm so sorry for Ella."

"So am I," said Frankie, with a little smile.

The scene at the Duchess of Warminster's was more wonderful than anything I could have imagined.

The great hall, with its marble staircase, brilliantly lit, glowed with colour. Masses of flowers, crimson, scarlet and gold, threw up the dazzling purity of the white marble, and up and down the broad, cool steps there came and went a procession, never ending, gorgeous beyond words. Stately women flashing with diamonds, brave in silk and satin, young girls fair and sweet as the lilies that they held. Princes from the Far East in garments rich in warmth and colour as the sun, purple and gold standing side by side with a grave, blackcoated Englishman, or a foreign diplomatist blazing with orders heavily jewelled.

Frankie made a sensation even in that assemblage. Something there was in the carriage of her head, in her slow, graceful movements, in the brilliance of her smile, that marked her out; she was distinctive and created an impression on the mind apart from that called up by other and perhaps more beautiful women.

The Duchess gave me a charming smile and said Lord Chesterton must take care of me. His Lordship immediately seized my programme and commandeered some half-dozen numbers. He waltzed to perfection. I never enjoyed myself so much.

We sat out in the conservatory for one dance, and I took the opportunity to explain that I was not wholly given over to betting. I didn't give Mrs. Blount away. I think it's mean of one woman to tell tales of another, but I fancy he gathered how matters stood.

"Promise me you won't bet any more—except for gloves," he said, taking my hand.

"Never," I answered fervently, and told him how worried I had been to get the eight hundred pounds.

"When I've sold the shares and got the money I don't know exactly how I am to pay the bookmakers. I suppose I'd better send it to Mrs. Blount?"

"I'll settle with them, if you like," he said.

"Thank you so much, Lord Chesterton. I shall have the money by to-morrow afternoon, if you wouldn't mind calling for it at Pont Street, I shall be very grateful."

He said something foolish but rather nice in reply, about the happiness it would give him to see me not only the next, but every day.

We didn't talk much after that, but sat and—thought.

Sir Gregory appeared at the beginning of the next dance, Frankie on his arm.

The distinguished general was entirely captivated. Rumour had it that Lady Gregory, though extremely virtuous, was somewhat acidulated; doubtless the contrast between Milady and Mrs. Norton depressed the gallant soldier, for he sighed heavily and looked sentimental.

I did not think it necessary to remain as a spectator of the interview, so suggested to Lord Chesterton that we should

make a move. I can only surmise, therefore, as to what transpired between my cousin and the brave Sir Gregory. The conclusion of the matter, however, came under my notice. Frankie passed me on the staircase leaning on his arm.

"It is so good of you, Sir Gregory," she murmured. "You've taken such a weight off my mind. How glad my poor maid will be when I tell her that her sweetheart will get his discharge. How can I thank you?"

Sir Gregory did not reply in words. He gave a quick glance up and down the stairs; for the moment the coast was clear—I suppose I didn't count. Then, with a sudden movement he slipped his arm about my cousin's waist and kissed her!

When I and my partner regained the ballroom, Frankie was the centre of a group of admirers. It was during the first interval, and she was holding a sort of court.

I shall never forget her that evening.

Tall, stately, regal almost in her jewelled robe, she stood surrounded by men, clever, distinguished, notable throughout Europe.

It was the zenith of her triumph. I watched and almost held my breath. Suddenly she turned to a dark, clever-looking man at her right. He was a very celebrated person indeed, and remarkable as much for his dislike of woman as for his talents. It was, therefore, a distinct tribute to my cousin's fascinations that he should single her out for his attentions.

Fêted, flattered, and caressed she must indeed have felt triumphant. All thoughts of past unhappiness must, I thought, have left her; there could be no shadows in the past dark enough to cloud the present. Nothing could stop her now. Those years in Jamaica—a reference to which always called up a look of apprehension in Frankie's face—must seem to her a dream. There could be nothing in that far-off time that could touch her now—the guest of the most exclusive lady in England.

Suddenly her face grew white, a look curiously like fear crept into her eyes. She clutched my arm and her limbs trembled. I followed her gaze, travelling down the ball-room, radiant with light and life, resplendent with every sign of wealth and taste—and she the centre of it all. I followed her gaze right to the end of the vast room, and there in a doorway stood two men—Percival Hope and another.

That other was a mean and sordid-looking man, yellow skinned, with a furtive expression in his eyes. He was strangely out of place by Percival's side, resting his hand on Percival's arm. What could so mean a creature have to do with the beautiful woman who turned sick and faint at sight of him?

The man was speaking now, pointing with a lean finger towards Frankie. He leant forward, and in a clear, piercing voice called out:

"Yes, it is she, I swear it."

And at the words and gesture my cousin quailed. She drew a deep, hard breath and seemed to gasp for air. Quickly the crowd round her dispersed, one ran for water, another for this remedy and that.

My cousin did not seem to heed them. She leant against me heavily.

"After all these years," she gasped, "to come *now, now.*"

"What is it?" I inquired. "Oh, tell me what it is!"

"He is from Jamaica," she said in a low, hoarse voice, "and he knows all!"

(A most exciting instalment is published next Tuesday.)

POET: "Whatever does this mean? My publisher sends me a bill for a new waste-paper basket!"

MOTHER (to suitor): "No, I can never give you my daughter. I have quite made up my mind." Suitor: "Then I'm doubly disappointed. I vowed that I would have a lovely wife and a young looking mother-in-law." Mother: "Well—or—you may call again. I may change my mind."

Your Editor Chats.

THE editor of a popular fiction paper like SHORT STORIES has opportunities of coming in contact with very queer specimens of humanity, either personally, or through the post. Scarcely a week elapses but that I receive a call from some extraordinary individual who is under the impression that he, or she, is a sort of Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë, who has never yet had opportunities of getting their true merit appreciated.

A WOULD-BE NOVELIST.

I am one of the first to encourage young and promising writers of fiction, and to give such advice as lies in my power to bring out their best points, but I like modesty even in a story-writer. I am, therefore, highly amused when I get a letter from a youth from which I make the following extract:

"Of course, I don't suppose you will be able to fully appreciate the merits of my story, because, you see, your standard of merit is so infinitely below that of my own. I sometimes look over your paper, SHORT STORIES, and I think it is very good of its kind, but I think that you ought to insert more fiction of the nature of the inclosed."

"The inclosed," my dear readers, was entitled "Julius Cæsar," and was the story of the life of Julius Cæsar obviously written in the form of an essay after the writer had read Shakespeare's play!

A GENEROUS OFFER.

Another young writer, this time a girl, in inclosing me a story which would occupy a whole issue of SHORT STORIES, all about nothing at all (and very badly written at that), tells me that I can have this story for nothing if I will send her six copies of the paper in which it appears, for which she is willing to pay. I am sorry to say I was unable to accept her generous offer.

But, seriously, I know that there must be amongst the readers of SHORT STORIES a large number of girls and young men who are quite capable of turning out a good story, and next week I shall have a chat with you about the best method of getting to work.

WOULD YOU WIN A SILVER PENCIL-CASE?

This week I am offering one of our now famous solid silver pencil-cases to the reader who sends me the longest list of words of six letters and upwards which also form a word when spelt backwards, thus "drawer" when spelt backwards is "reward." Lists must be written on the backs of postcards only, which must be marked "Reverse," addressed to the Competition Editor, SHORT STORIES, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C. The competition closes after the first post on Tuesday morning, August 12th. Ten consolation gifts of rolled gold charms and rolled gold hearts will be sent to those competitors whose lists come next in order of merit.

RESULT OF THE "THREE WORDS" COMPETITION.

The first prize of a handsome barbaric guard for this competition goes to J. Jones, 5, Worcester Place, Swansea, while the ten consolation gifts of rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms go to the following: Miss B. Gush, Cruwys Morchard, Tiverton, Devon; F. Beadnell, 282, Stanhope Road, Tyne Dock, South Shields; A. Isted, 3, Caxton Villas, Gordon Hill, Enfield; J. Ramsden, Wallwark Terrace, The Hague, Stalybridge; D. Ferguson, 13, Anfield Row, Dundee; Miss M. H. Ingles, Westberry Stores, Westberry Avenue, Wood Green; J. R. Morris, 27, Richmond Road, Oxford; C. J. Long, 49, Walsingham Road, Colchester; A. Reoch, 123, Victoria Road, Dundee; J. Gluck, 23, Southwold Road, Upper Clapton, N.E.

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The End of the Fight.

The Tale of a Long Family Feud.

Silverton is a quiet, old-fashioned little town, lying in as charming a bit of country as one would wish to see. Soon after leaving the village the road towards the south passes an old stone house, which has been standing there for ages, and still looks strong enough to be the future home of generations yet unborn.

About and beyond it lie broad fields of grain, growing yellow under the August sunshine, and acres of corn rustling in the summer breeze.

And all this is the property of one fortunate man. Standing upon the broad balcony of the old stone house, he can look towards the east and towards the west, and call it his own almost as far as he can see.

But some years ago the farm had two owners, and Richard Dean, who lived in the stone house, and John Marshall, who owned the land opposite to it on the other side of the road, were no friends. There had been some ancient quarrel about landmarks, the families had nursed their enmity, and transmitted it from father to son along with the family acres.

There had been Deans and Marshalls in Silverton almost from the time when the town first had a name; but they were from widely different walks in life. The first of the Deans was a wealthy Londoner, who, in travelling through the country, was charmed with the natural beauty of the place, bought a large tract of land there, and built the stone house of this story.

The first of the Marshalls came into Silverton with all his worldly goods in the bundle which he carried under his arm, and the bundle was not heavy. He came as ordinary farm hand to one of the farmers in the neighbourhood. After a year's service he married the farmer's daughter, who, being an only child, in process of time dutifully inherited her father's acres, and handed them over to her lucky lord.

Since those days there had been some great changes. None of the Deans had ever added to their original inheritance, and one of the family had so crippled his resources by extravagance that it became necessary for him to sell a portion of his estate.

The Marshalls, from father to son, had ever been a frugal set, and the grandfather of John Marshall was, by this time, able to buy the land his fast-living neighbour was forced to part with. It was from a dispute as to landmarks, arising from this sale, that the quarrel which we have mentioned sprung. The case was carried to law; the Deans came off victorious, and the Marshalls never forgave it.

Moreover, it was rumoured, that when Richard Dean of this story married the beautiful daughter of the old Silverton clergyman, it touched John Marshall very nearly; so that between the old wound to the pocket and the wound to the affections, the family quarrel seemed in no way likely to die out.

It reached its climax when the two farmers, who belonged to opposite parties in politics, became rival Parliamentary candidates. John Marshall was beaten, and choosing to consider his defeat as a direct personal injury inflicted by his neighbour, vowed that he would be even with him. And Richard Dean, when he came home at the close of his session, found that this had been no idle threat.

Across the road, directly in front of his house, loomed up before him the frame of a huge barn. Workmen were busy plying their noisy hammers, loose timbers were scattered about, great heaps of boards lay piled up here and there ready for use, and all the dirt and rubbish of building defaced the once beautiful meadow.

Mr. Dean stood aghast, and could scarcely believe his eyes. His pretty daughter tripped out upon the balcony to meet him; but almost before the kiss with which she greeted him was off her pouting lips, she exclaimed—

"Oh, papa, isn't it a shame? Could you have believed that any man would be so mean? Is there nothing to be done? Must we have that horrid barn always before our eyes?"

Yes, the barn was there, and stayed. Mr. Dean found himself powerless. In the eye of the law the barn could not be made to appear a nuisance, whatever it might be to the dwellers in the stone house. So there was nothing to be done but to pocket their wrath, and, if possible, to possess their souls in patience, while the monster grew day by day, until at last it stood complete in its ugliness, cutting off the view of the beautiful hills and the pretty pond which nestled at their feet, hiding the big knoll, where a group of gigantic trees kept watch and ward over the meadows below them, and shutting out even the sunset.

The acme of ugliness was reached, and the disappointed farmer's revenge must have been fully satisfied when the building had been painted the brightest, tawdriest yellow that ever disgraced a paint-pot, and "Marshall's barn" had become a byword in the neighbourhood.

"'What can't be cured must be endured,'" Mr. Dean remarked to his daughter, by way of saying something both original and comforting.

But Miss Alice had no idea of sitting down patiently to endure, when, though a cure was not to be hoped for, matters might at least be mended. The mountain would not move for Mahomet, and the barn was not likely to be more accommodating; but something might, perhaps, be done in the way of hiding it. And Alice was to be seen daily on the lawn, busily at work with her own hands, and superintending the labours of others. Hitherto the balcony had been left entirely open, with nothing to intercept the beautiful view; but now creepers began to climb there, seeming to vie with each other in hastening upward with their delicate, leafy wall, and hanging baskets with tall plants and long streamers of luxuriant ivy did what they could in the common cause. Here and there screens of lattice-work were set up, where, one of these days, roses would bloom, and a hawthorn hedge was planted, and coaxed with every cunning device for speedy growth.

All this did very well while summer lasted; but when the autumn winds and frost had laid bare every tree and shrub, stripped the leaves from the creepers, and carried destruction among the flower-baskets, then the barn stood forth again in its nakedness, a great yellow blot upon the landscape. In fact, as they looked out of the balcony windows of the stone house, it seemed to be the only thing that was seen.

Mr. Dean tried to take the infliction philosophically, since there was no remedy for it, and succeeded in putting it out of his mind about as well as people generally do when a thing is constantly in sight. But Alice, who was a lady of some spirit, was at no pains either to lessen or conceal her indignation.

It was during the winter which followed the building of the barn that young Marshall, as he was called, returned from Germany. John Marshall had bestowed upon his only son

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every opportunity for that extended intelligence and culture which those of his name had hitherto considered of little value compared with the accumulation of land and money. "There is money enough," he said, "and John shall have what he wants, provided he does not squander it."

Sole heir to the Marshall farm, which had grown to be the largest in the county, good-looking, frank, and jovial, and with an ease and grace of manner conferred by three years of foreign travel, he speedily became the lion of Silverton. At the village parties and social gatherings all united to welcome and do him honour, with one exception. A haughty bow was the only acknowledgment that Alice Dean would vouchsafe his presence. She could not be brought to include herself in any conversation in which he took part, and her cool withdrawal from a group which he chanced to join would often place their mutual friends in embarrassing positions. Her father, having noticed this on one occasion when they had been out together, remonstrated with her on their return home, mildly suggesting that she should endeavour to keep her angry feelings a little more out of sight.

"This young man is not to blame for his father's conduct, you know," he continued.

"Of course not," said Alice, "but he's his father's son. No," she added, after a moment's silence, "it's of no use trying. I can never be civil to a Marshall, with that hideous yellow barn staring me in the face."

Five minutes later, Mr. Dean, who had taken up and was looking over his newspaper, laid it down in a hurry, as Alice remarked, in a slow, deliberate way, as though she had at last made up her mind—

"Papa, that barn will be the ruin of my temper. I am going to set fire to it!"

Mr. Dean glanced about the room, half afraid that they were not alone, before he replied—

"My child, that may be a pleasant little joke of yours, but it is lucky that there was no one to hear it but myself."

"It's no joke at all, papa. I am quite serious. I have been thinking about it for some time, and I mean to do it."

Mr. Dean took off his eyeglasses, and looked attentively at his daughter.

"Upon my word, I believe the child has some such intention," he said to himself. To her he said—

"It is your opinion, then, that you have a right to make away with your neighbour's property whenever your pleasure is not consulted in its situation?"

"It is my opinion," said Alice, with the confident logic of eighteen years, "that my neighbour has no right to set up an abominable nuisance under my very nose. And if he can't be made to remove it, I think I should be justified in getting rid of it in the easiest way possible."

"And you think also, upon mature consideration," said Mr. Dean, "that you would prefer the view of four walls of a prison for the next ten or fifteen years, to that of your neighbour's barn?"

"Is that the punishment for arson?"

"It is."

"Oh, but I should not be caught. I have several plans, any one of which is quite safe."

"But, unfortunately, you have a witness of your intentions," said Mr. Dean quite seriously.

"No one but you, and, of course, you wouldn't testify against me."

"Indeed, I should," returned Mr. Dean, with the air of a stern, impartial judge.

"Oh, papa, I won't believe it!"

And Alice took a seat upon her father's knee.

"Yes," said the inexorable father, "I mean it. If you burn Mr. Marshall's barn, I shall tell all I know about the matter."

"And send me to prison?"

"To be sure. I would be sorry, of course, as it would deprive me of a valuable housekeeper. Nevertheless, I should feel bound to do it."

And Mr. Dean, looking into the large blue eyes which gazed at his with such a serious expression, seemed half in earnest.

"Come, come, Alice," he exclaimed, at length. "It is high time for us to put a stop to such talk as this; and, what is more, you must promise me not to harbour such dangerous notions in that busy brain of yours."

"I can't promise. It is impossible to control one's thoughts," returned Alice, with a shake of the head that was comically serious.

"Very well," said Mr. Dean; "then I must keep you where you will be in no danger of doing mischief."

Here the pretty incendiary burst into her usual merry laugh, kissed her father, bade him good-night, and went to her room, coming back to say:

"I won't burn the barn to-night, papa, so you can rest in peace."

It was late in July, and the day had been very warm; one of those sultry days which come unexpectedly, and, taking us unawares, half prostrate us with their sudden heat. Clouds had been threatening all the evening, great masses which seemed to gather blackness as they rolled westward, and at midnight low growls of thunder began to break the stillness, and the big drops of rain to patter noiselessly against the window-pane.

Alice awoke, and lay watching the vivid flashes which now and then lighted up her room and left it in blacker darkness than before, when suddenly there came a sharp, deafening crash, then peal after peal of thunder, which seemed to shake the old house to its very foundations, and to shiver and vibrate through its every inch of mortar and stone.

Alice buried her head among the bedclothes, and lay quaking with fear and half-benumbed by the shock. When she at last ventured to uncover her head and look out from her retreat, the room was all aglow, every object in it as plainly seen as at noonday. It could not be the lightning, for it remained steady and uninterrupted, each moment growing brighter and brighter. Jumping from the bed, she rushed to the window, and saw a sight which chained her to the spot, forgetful of everything but what was before her.

The barn was in flames!

The lightning had struck it and set fire to its contents. Tons upon tons of hay were burning fiercely. Their dry masses, kindled into a huge red mountain of roaring, leaping flames, shone luridly upon the black sky, and glared over the country for miles around.

In the weird, fitful beauty of the scene, Alice was for the time totally unmindful that it was of any direct, personal interest to her; but when it suddenly occurred to her what it was, she flew to her father's room, half wild with excitement and delight.

Mr. Dean's room was on the opposite side of the house, and he had seen no signs of the fire. Being a sound sleeper, the thunder had only partially disturbed him, so that he was no more than half awake, when Alice came bouncing to his bedside, exclaiming:

"Oh, papa, papa! The barn is burning! But I didn't do it!"

"Alice, are you crazy?" said Mr. Dean, as by the dim light of the night-light he saw her whirling about the room, performing a rapturous *pas seul*, and looking, in her long white gown, like a very frisky goat.

There was no more sleep that night for the family in the stone house; and when morning broke, cloudless and beautiful after the storm, there lay the untarnished landscape spread out before them in all its old familiar beauty, and Marshall's barn a heap of ruins at their feet.

For one short week Mr. Dean and his daughter rejoiced over this unlooked-for deliverance. They blessed the storm, and congratulated themselves morning, noon, and night, as they gazed upon the unbroken prospect which had never seemed half so charming before. Then there began to be a stir among the few charred and blackened timbers which the fire had spared—fresh ones were deposited beside them, load after load of building materials arrived, and, to their utter dismay, they learnt that the barn was to be rebuilt. Mr. Dean remonstrated to no purpose, and friendly neigh-

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bours vainly tried their persuasions on the obstinate old man. Young Marshall, who was deeply mortified and grieved at his father's course, exerted all the eloquence which he possessed to prevent the carrying out of this malicious design; but the only reply which he received was: "See here, my boy, you come and go as you choose, and I interfere with none of your plans. You act your pleasure, and I shall act mine."

So the work went on with all possible speed, and the raising day was at hand. A crowd had gathered, as was usual on such occasions in the country. The huge frame was being slowly hoisted to its place, with shouts and cheers and heave-aways, when some part of the structure suddenly gave way, and timber after timber came tumbling to the ground. Two or three men received ugly knocks and hard bruises, but all escaped without serious injury, with one exception. John Marshall lay upon the ground under a heavy timber, with a broken arm, and a stream of blood flowing from a wound in his head, cut by a sharp stone, upon which he had struck in falling.

He was taken up insensible, and laid upon the grass; water was dashed in his face to revive him, and his head bound up in handkerchiefs to stop the flow of blood. A doctor was quickly brought to the spot, sewed up the wound, and bandaged the disabled arm.

"What is to be done with him?" he asked, with a grave face, as he concluded the operation. "To move him any distance in his present condition would surely prove fatal."

"Bring him into my house, and we will do the best we can for him," said Mr. Dean, who came out on hearing of the accident.

So the unconscious man was carried in and placed upon a bed; and there he lay for many a long day, prostrate and helpless in the house of him whom he had hated and injured. His son had been sent for, but the messenger was long in finding him. When he arrived the crowd had dispersed, and Mr. Dean was standing by the bedside of his father, while Alice was bathing the invalid's head, and striving to keep it cool with applications of ice.

"Mr. Dean," said the young man, after gazing silently for some minutes at his father, who was still in a state of stupor, "I should in any case be extremely sorry for such an intrusion as this; but, under the circumstances, I feel that it is truly unpardonable. I will have my poor father removed to-night, if it is possible."

"You must not think of such a thing," Mr. Dean replied warmly. "The doctor has expressly forbidden it. You must take care of your father here, and in doing so I trust you will spare yourself all uneasiness as to intrusion."

"Good Heavens! Are we to thrust ourselves upon you in this way?" exclaimed young Marshall, half-beside himself with anxiety for his father's safety, and mortification at the embarrassing position in which he found himself. "I beg pardon, sir, but your generosity makes me feel more painfully than ever that all claim to it has been forfeited. I can only assure you that even you yourself cannot have regretted the cause of trouble more than I have done."

"I believe you!" said Mr. Dean cordially, much affected by his impulsive expression of feeling. He extended his hand, which Marshall received gratefully, while Alice, who had melted at the first signal of distress, wished from the bottom of her heart that she had treated the young man with more consideration. Her blue eyes were swimming when he said to her: "Pray let me relieve you, Miss Dean; I fear you have tired yourself already."

Weeks had passed before John Marshall became fully conscious of his situation. Fever set in, and he grew delirious; and when at last the delirium passed away, he fell into a stupor, which seemed almost more hopeless than his former state. He had been lying for a long time with scarcely a sign of life about him, except the feeble fluttering of his pulse, when his son, who had watched over him night and day, saw him slowly open his eyes and gaze with a look of faint wonder about the room. He was too weak to speak; but when days had elapsed, and he had gained sufficient strength, he asked no questions. The barn, or rather its skeleton, which remained as it had been left on the day of the accident, was in plain sight from a window near his bed; and he would lie hour after hour gazing at it, silently closing his eyes at any attempt at conversation, and scarcely giving an answer to the few questions which were put to him.

Young Marshall was sitting one day sadly wondering what were the thoughts over which he seemed brooding, when the sick man turned slowly in his bed, and, in a quiet way, as though it were no uncommon request that he was about to make, said to his son:

"John, I should like to have you see that everything belonging to that barn over there is carried off, and the place cleared up. Do it as soon as possible—will you?"

"Certainly, father, if you wish it," his son remarked, not knowing whether to be most astonished or rejoiced.

"Perhaps you can attend to it now," said Mr. Marshall. "I do not need you. I think I shall go to sleep." And he closed his eyes as if he wished nothing more to be said.

Young Marshall was not slow in executing his father's wishes, and two days had not passed before all traces of the barn had disappeared. A few days more, and Mr. Marshall signified his intention of going home, firmly resisting all persuasions to the contrary.

"I shall leave here to-day," he said to his son. "And when I am ready to go, John, I should like to see Mr. Dean and his daughter. Ask them to meet me on the balcony."

So, leaning upon his son, a weak, broken-down man, he tottered across the threshold over which he had been carried two months before. Sinking into an arm-chair, which Mr. Dean made ready for him, while Alice softly arranged the pillows about him, he said, in a voice shaken with weakness and emotion:

"Richard Dean, I never thought I should have to thank you for anything; but I have been brought to it. You and I were never the best of friends, and a year ago I swore to do you harm as long as I lived. But the Almighty set his face against me. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord, and He kept his word. He has repaid me for all I have done. This thing has made an old man of me, and there's no telling now how long I shall last. I want to make my peace with you, Richard, and your family, and to live as friends for the rest of my days, if you will let bygones be bygones."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Dean, grasping in both his own the thin white hand held out to him. "We shall have you a hale, hearty old man yet, and we shall begin anew; and from this day henceforth Marshalls and Deans shall dwell together in unity."

"That's just what Alice has promised me," said young Marshall, twining his arm about the young blue-eyed girl by his side, all tears and smiles and blushes, while the two fathers gazed—one with astonishment, which soon changed to gladness, and the other with a satisfied look in his eyes, which had long seen what was going on between the young people.

Meanwhile the sun went down upon a group the like of which was never seen in Silvertown.

The lovers have long been happily married, and an orchard of apple trees is now growing where once stood "Marshall's barn."

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THE GREAT "PASS-IT-ALONG" SCHEME.

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(A)

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When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

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NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

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The Retort Crushing.

Lord Tuffnutt: "You have nothing to grumble at whatever; you were a rich American girl, I an impoverished English nobleman, with a proud title. You bought me with your wealth. I was what you would simply call in shopping, a bargain!" Lady Tuffnutt: "Pardon me! Not a bargain—a remnant."

Same Thing.

She: "Did you ever play football?" He (watching the game): "No; but I once got caught in a drove of stampeded oxen."

Might Have Been Said Differently.

She: "You say that my consenting to marry you has made you very happy?" He: "Yes. You see what a simple thing it takes to make me happy."

Fruitful Soil.

"I've noticed one thing about widow's weeds," said his reverence. "What's that?" asked his worship. "They rarely interfere with the growth of orange blossoms on the same soil."

Didn't Appreciate Music.

"I'm sorry you don't like the new nurse," she said to her husband. "She is so good about singing to baby and keeping him quiet." "Yes," was the calm reply, "but I'd rather hear the baby cry!"

Still Worse.

Penelope: "I suppose he broke your heart eventually?" Perdita: "Far worse" Penelope: "You don't mean to say he broke the engagement?" Perdita: "No. He played nap with papa and broke him."

Very Precious.

What more precious offering can be laid upon the altar of a man's heart than the first love of a pure, earnest, and affectionate girl, with an undivided interest in eight corner plots and fourteen three-storey houses?

His Expectations.

Angelina: "What did you tell papa about your prospects?" Edwin: "I said had expectations from my uncle." Angelina: "Why, Edwin, you told me you had no relatives at all." Edwin: "Oh, yes, but I'm going to pawn my watch this evening."

Poor Human Nature.

"Women dress very ridiculously," he said, as he watched his wife finishing her toilet. "It is the fashion, John," she said, pleasantly. "Fashion be hanged!" said he. "I would be superior to fashion if I were a woman, and wear nothing not useful." Five minutes later he asked her to sew a button on the back of his coat.

All Over.

Lady Belle: "I should think that he would propose soon?" Miss Grahame: "Oh, no; it's all over! He never really meant anything." Lady Belle: "Why, have you quarrelled?" Miss Grahame: "No, but yesterday he gave me a box—such a lot—of stationery!" Lady Belle: "But presents are always promising." Miss Grahame: "But my initials are on it; and such a lot! Oh, no! It's all over between us!"

Self Condemned.

Teacher (to scholar): "What are you laughing at? Not at me?" Scholar: "Oh, no, sir!" Teacher: "Then what else is there in the room to laugh at?"

Before and After.

"What's this card in your pocket, John?" asked his wife. "That? Oh, before I went to lunch that was a bill of fare. Now it is my table of contents."

So He Ought.

Figg: "What a peculiar man Dunder is. He has a sovereign contempt for anybody who doesn't know as much as he does." Fogg: "I should think he would."

Nurses' Elysium.

First Nurse-girl: "So you've got a new place?" Second Nurse-girl: "Yes." "Do you like it?" "Like it? Why, it is right in front of a police-station!"

Unselfish.

Waiter (to farmer visiting London who has been dining in a restaurant): "Anything, sir, for the waiter, sir?" Farmer (looking at his plate): "Oh, yes. Take all there's left; I've finished."

Too Large-Hearted.

Brother: "And you rejected him?" Sister: "I did." "He has the reputation of being a large-hearted man." "That's the trouble with him; he is too large-hearted. He can love half-a-dozen women at the same time."

Photographic.

Dolley: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me, and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate as though hesitating to pain you?" "No, she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

Gets Ready the Evidence.

A judge of much experience says: "I never had a breach of promise case before me in which the mother of the girl didn't know more about it than her daughter. She always suspects the fellow is a rascal, and gets ready for him."

A Pleasing Gift.

He: "Have you decided what to give your old aunt for a birthday present?" She: "No; but now I come to think of it, the poor old maid has had very little pleasure all her life; you might just write her an anonymous love-letter."

An Anchor to Windward.

Agnes: "What is troubling you so, love?" George: "I was thinking that if you declined me when I proposed to-night whether I should accept the heiress who is so anxious to marry me." Agnes: "Why, George, you know I love you."

What is Milk?

They were in the country for the summer, and the little daughter had been shown all the farming processes. Two or three nights ago she pushed away her bowl, declaring that she did not care to feed any longer upon milk. "But, my dear," said mother, "why not?" "Because," said the precocious child, with a conscious air of superiority, "I know all about it. Milk is only chewed grass."

A Sure Sign.

Anxious Mother: "My dear, I'm afraid William is getting into bad company. He is out late every night." Observing Father: "Oh, he's all right. He goes to see some girl or other. Shouldn't wonder if he'd announce his engagement soon." "He hasn't said a word about any young lady." "No; but he's keeping company with one all the same. His right wrist is covered with pin scratches."

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THE GIRL AT NUMBER NINE.

A Pathetic Narrative of a Lovers' Quarrel.

SHE was neither picturesque nor romantic; and in the suburban parish where she lived there were probably a hundred girls prettier than she. But a bright, unselfish nature will make even a plain face attractive; and there were times when you would have said that little Nellie Graham was more than comely.

Each week-day morning, punctually at a quarter to eight, you might see her setting off for a two-mile walk to the Board School in Hirst Street, where, as head teacher, she received a salary which enabled her to provide for the wants of the household.

Of a sunny disposition she always endeavoured to look on the bright side of things. But the dark side would persist in showing itself, especially when, as it often happened, her father—a confirmed beer-drinker—with foul oaths would demand money from her; while her mother—a confirmed invalid—would signal to her from the horse-hair couch to obey him.

At length, however, the time came when even her darkest days had a gleam of sunshine. Love, entering her life, had glorified it.

Her sweetheart's name was Marston. He was a draughtsman at Cranston's big works; and, with a salary of £140 per annum, had dreams of future greatness.

To most people he was an ordinary young man, with a fair amount of good looks; but to Nellie he was a hero, and well-nigh as handsome as Apollo Belvedere.

* * * * *

"First love is a pretty romance,
But not half so sweet as 'tis reckoned;
And when one awakes from the trance,
There's a vast deal of love in the second."

Such was Tom Marston's belief. He was three-and-twenty, when a certain bright-eyed, golden-haired damsel jilted him. Possibly she had a good reason for so doing. At all events, Tom considered himself ill-used, and for a time was an avowed cynic. And then he met Nellie Graham.

Twelve months had now elapsed since the day of their engagement; and so far he saw no reason to doubt his sweetheart's fidelity.

His was not a big nature; he was not of the stuff of which heroes are made; but probably the strongest affection of which he was capable was given to Nellie Graham.

But the course of true love, hitherto running smoothly, received a sudden check. In this wise. Having been informed by his chief that his salary would shortly be substantially increased, Tom on leaving the office went straight to town and there invested eighteen-and-sixpence in a present for his sweetheart, to be given to her upon her birthday. And that same evening, well pleased with himself and the world, he set off for 9, Ventnor Road. Nellie was not at home, and the news momentarily damped his spirits. Would she be long away? Mrs. Graham could not say; and so Tom sat down, and chatting with the old lady, waited eagerly for the sound of his sweetheart's footstep in the hallway. But he waited in vain, and at length he took his departure.

By this time his high spirits had completely evaporated. "I wonder where she has gone?" he said to himself. "She might have told her mother. Bother it! she has spoilt the whole evening."

The twilight was deepening; but Tom's eyes were keen, and presently he saw Nellie's trim little figure on the opposite pavement. She was walking quickly, her gaze straight in front of her, and not until she heard his voice was she aware of her sweetheart's presence.

His greeting was anything but lover-like—nine women out of ten would assuredly have resented it. "Where have you been?" he said, a note of irritation in his voice.

"I—I have been," she began falteringly, and then stopped, her head averted, her eyes upon the ground.

Instantly the demon of jealousy awoke within him. "You've been walking with someone," he exclaimed hoarsely. "Who was it? Some man, I suppose!"

With that she raised her head, and looking straight into his eyes: "Yes," she said firmly, almost, it seemed to him defiantly, "it was a man, and I have been walking with him for an hour or more."

For a moment he was dumfounded. Then, "Oh, indeed!" he said, striving to control his voice. "I—we'll talk about it later on—perhaps. Good evening!" And off he swung, chin in air, twirling his cane between his fingers.

* * * * *

That evening, and the day following, Tom sulked like a spoilt child. Nellie must be taught a lesson! His wounded self-esteem demanded as much. But it was far from his thoughts to allow this parting to be final. For hers was the stronger nature (in his heart of hearts he knew it); she was his wise little counsellor, and without her he would assuredly drift on life's voyage, like a barque that has lost its steering gear.

He did not doubt he had a rival. Probably the fellow was good-looking and glib-tongued; and so Nellie, womanlike, was flattered by his attentions. But her heart—ah, *that* belonged entirely to him, Tom Marston! And he did not intend to lose it! But Nellie, he repeated, must be taught a lesson. She would be expecting him to call to-day or to-morrow or the day following; and then she would write, begging him to come and see her.

But as the days went by (the longest four he had ever known) without bringing the looked-for letter, Tom became decidedly unhappy. To stay in his room was unbearable; to seek his friends in his present frame of mind was not to be thought of; and so, eager for distraction, he walked into the city, and turning into a music-hall, booked a seat in the stalls.

The curtain rose; and as "turn" succeeded "turn," it is probable that in all that vast audience the one implacably severe critic was Tom Marston. Nothing pleased him. The comic songs lacked humour, the sentimental possessed a distinct tendency to pathos, the acrobatic feats were devoid of originality; even Stella May, the "star" of the evening, radiant, outshining all her predecessors, failed to awaken his interest

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On the following day, his pride was perilously near capitulation. Yes, he would see Nellie—perhaps this very evening—and if her explanation of her conduct should prove satisfactory, all might yet be well!

He had changed his collar, and was adjusting a neat brand-new necktie, when he heard the whirring of the electric bell. The postman! His heart beat faster at the thought; and, full of eager expectancy, he hurried to the front door.

"*Chronicle*, sir?"

With a sense of keen disappointment Tom took the local weekly newspaper from the newsboy, and re-entering his sitting-room, sat down, and mechanically opened the sheet.

For a moment or two he glanced indifferently across the columns, and then, suddenly, his eye caught the following paragraph.

"Heroism of a Handsworth Lady."

"Yesterday evening a horse, standing between the shafts of a trap in Claremont Avenue, took fright at a passing steam-roller, and suddenly bolted. A little boy who happened to be playing in the road at the time was in imminent danger of being run over, when a young lady (Miss Ellen Graham of Ventnor Road) seeing his peril, ran into the roadway and rescued him. Miss Graham, we regret to state, was knocked over, the wheel passing over her body, and now lies at her home in a precarious condition."

In a flash a numbness fell upon his brain. This, however, lasted but a moment, and was followed by a curious sense of unreality; and for a space he sat staring at the paragraph, his face the colour of cigar ash. "Miss Ellen Graham." It was a mistake! It could not be *his* Nellie, his little girl! She, who was so healthy and strong when he last saw her, to be suddenly struck down! To be lying on a bed of pain! The troubled current of his thoughts came to an abrupt standstill. Snatching his cap from the table he rushed from the house; and never before did he cover a mile so quickly as the one which lay between his lodgings and Ventnor Road.

The door was opened by a tall, good-looking man of thirty or thereabouts, whose deeply-tanned complexion seemed indicative of a recent residence in a tropical climate.

Straightway Tom panted out the question nearest his heart. The reply to which ("Better, much better") acted upon him like news of a reprieve upon a man awaiting execution.

"You are Tom Marston, I suppose? . . . I thought so. I am Ned Graham—Nell's brother. Will you come inside?"

* * * * *

Ten minutes later Tom was standing by the bedside. They were alone.

"I knew you would come," she whispered, her eyes lighting up with a smile of gladness.

A hard lump suddenly sprang into Tom's throat. It came to him that the shadow of death was on her face, and with a broken cry he sank down by the bedside. "Nell! Nell!" he cried, "can you ever forgive me? My God! what a heartless brute——"

"Hush, dear," she said soothingly; and, stretching out her hand she laid it caressingly upon his head. "It was my fault—mine. I could have explained; but I didn't. I let you go, and I made you unhappy. My brother Ned," she continued, her voice growing stronger, "wrote me a letter begging me to meet him——"

"'Twas he you were with that evening. Oh, what a fool, what a blind fool——"

"Hush, Tom! you mustn't talk like that. Besides" (with a faint smile and a look of mock severity) "it's very rude to interrupt. Ned, you see, had a dreadful quarrel with father some years ago, and ran away to Africa. But now it's all right again between them. And father has taken the pledge; and Tom says he is going to take care of mother. It seems almost too good to be true." She paused; then suddenly, "Sir," she said, "do you know that you haven't kissed me yet?"

"I was waiting to be forgiven," he said humbly, almost reverently, as he bent over the pillow.

"There was nothing to forgive, dear," she said softly. "Besides, sweethearts often have tiffs, you know; and we've only had one! And we have been engaged twelve months—twelve months this very day, Tom. Did you remember?"

"I—I had forgotten," he stammered.

"We've been very happy," she went on, dreamily, as if speaking to herself. "We couldn't, of course, expect to have *all* the sunshine; and 'twas only a very little cloud that came between us."

"Nell, dear," he said, "with God's help I'll try to control my wretched temper. And nothing shall ever come between us again."

"Except one thing, Tom. I know you love me, dear; and if I don't get well, if I should die, I want you to be brave——"

"Nell, Nell!" he cried, with a horrible sinking at his heart, "you mustn't talk about dying. What should I do without you?" He paused. A middle-aged woman in the garb of a nurse had entered the room, and in obedience to her signal he turned to Nellie. "And now, dear," he said, with forced cheerfulness, "I must be going. I'm afraid I have wearied you."

She shook her head smilingly.

"I will come again in the morning," he went on. "We won't talk very much, but I'll just sit here beside you, and hold your hand, like this. D'ye see?" And bending over the pillow, he kissed her very tenderly.

"Good-bye, dearest," she said, her pale face illumined by a smile of absolute content.

"Not good-bye, sweetheart, but good-night." He strove to speak cheerily, but the effort was a failure. And then he went out into the darkness.

Next day his seat in the Drawing Office was vacant. For Number 9, Ventnor Road, was a house of mourning. And a mile beyond the suburb, Tom, like a stricken animal, crept beneath the friendly shades of a spinney; and there, casting himself upon the ground, wrestled with his grief, the greatest his life had ever known.

W. T. Crosbie.

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OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which he receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackam Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

ON BOARD THE BARGE.

TORTURING doubts and fears were scurrying fast through Esther's brain as, her chin resting on her hands, she stared at the name white-lettered on the stern of the barge. Catching sight of the pensive, graceful figure, Revelle was conscious of a thrill, and a quickening of the heart-beat. He felt annoyed with himself. He must watch himself, see that his heart—if indeed he possessed such a thing—did not obtain the mastery over his brain.

"Miss Mansfield!"

Esther started at the sound of the soft voice beside her, soft in tone, but jarring harshly on her thoughts. Crushing back a shiver, she glanced up. Revelle's hand was outstretched, his cap raised. His dark eyes were filled with a look of sympathy and respectful admiration; but, only a second before, they had glinted most unpleasantly. A newspaper lay at Esther's feet. He had been able to read the big-typed headlines staring up at him. She knew of Scarsdale's escape! At every twist and turn that fellow seemed to rise up and stand in his way! He seemed to be everlastingly figuring in the papers now. If only that warder's aim had been more true!

With an effort Esther took the outstretched hand; but she could not trust herself to look him in the face. Her eyes shifted away to the barge moored up alongside the jetty, and fastened on the name, *Mary Ann*.

"I'm awfully glad to have found you," said Revelle, placing a hand on the back of the seat, and bending over her. "Awfully glad to think that you're well enough to get out again. I was—er—dreadfully distressed to hear that you had been ill. I had no idea till I got down here. I'm afraid that ghastly affair at Warham—that poor creature's sad end—must have upset you frightfully."

Never so much as a falter in his voice, nor a twitch of a muscle.

"Single again!"

Never so much as a flicker of remorse, nor even of fear;

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only the exultant feeling of relief at being quit for ever of a burden. Fear! Why any fear? What chance was there, humanly speaking, that the truth could ever out?

"Please don't talk about that," whispered Esther.

As delicately as possible, avoiding all detail, Crump, in one of his letters, had told Esther of the verdict of the coroner's jury on Alice Vance, and of her interment. The little man had followed her to the grave, and after dusk, not wishing to call attention to himself, had placed a wreath upon the newly turned earth. In his letter he had not breathed a word of his suspicions, nor of his discoveries. In Esther's mind there was no suspicion of foul play—so far as the poor creature's end was concerned; but she had not forgotten that strange scene in the drawing-room of her home, when Vance, pointing at the man who was now bending over her, had cried—"That man is my husband!" The words had been subsequently denied; but the mystery of it all had haunted Esther. Was it possible that the words had been true, and the denial an untruth? Was it possible that this man who was still bending over—so horribly close—was morally guilty of the poor creature's loss of reason and sad end?

"I'm awfully sorry," murmured Revelle apologetically. "It was brutal—thoughtless of me."

The hatches covering the *Mary Ann's* capacious hold, had been whipped off, and the process of unloading started upon.

"They're picturesque things, these barges, with their tanned sails, aren't they?" added Revelle, abruptly changing the subject.

"Yes," answered Esther mechanically.

Where was he, the man she loved? A picture of him in an open boat, wounded, and dressed as she had seen him that day at Roxeter Junction, rose up, blotting out the immediate scene before her, for the moment making her forget the man at her side.

Revelle realised that her thoughts were wandering. He bit his lips. His rival had come between them as effectually as if he had been present. He was far too much of a diplomatist to make any reference to the convict's escape; but where was the fellow? Confusion overtake him!

The vision of the wounded felon in an open boat melted away, and reality, in the shape of the barge, shaped itself again before Esther's eyes. She could distinguish the features of the men on the deck as they toiled to the creaking music of crane and pulley-block. One man, sun-bronzed and bearded like the pard, who occasionally shouted out a command in a stentorian voice, was evidently the skipper. His red cap of stockinette gave a piratical touch to his appearance.

The light of the slanting afternoon sun swept the deck.

"If," said Revelle, "I were an artist, there would be the subject for a picture ready to hand—splendid effect of light and shade—chiaroscuro, don't you know, and that fellow in the pirate cap a magnificent study of character. I do so envy a fellow who can paint! I should so awfully like—er—to have a picture of you, not that it could do you justice, but, well, I should like to have it!"

Esther did not seem to hear. The piratical-looking skipper had ceased to bellow out commands, and was moving towards the cabin in the stern.

"How are you feeling, mate?" he shouted down the hatchway.

"Better," came back the answer, in a muffled, rather indistinct voice. What followed was so indistinct that it did not reach Esther and the man beside her.

But for a moment Esther had held her breath. A flush of colour had brightened her pale face. Only one word had reached her; but something in the tone of that muffled voice had recalled—the flush faded from her cheeks; she was breathing again. It was impossible. It was the work of her cruel imagination. The wish had been father to the thought.

The skipper went forward again.

"How long do you think of staying here, Miss Mansfield?" asked Revelle.

"We have not quite made up our minds. Mr. Walters has been kind enough to ask us to stay as long as possible."

Revelle sat down on the seat beside her, and leant forward a little, his face turned towards her and away from the barge.

A man was passing up slowly from the cabin. His head and shoulders appeared above the hatchway; then he stopped, and, shading his eyes from the light, glanced round.

The sunlight caught his face, unshaved, haggard, the hair about his temples streaked with grey.

Alec Scarsdale's face!

Esther had seen. The blood seemed to fade away from her very lips. Her dark eyes dilated, their expression indescribable! Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she half-rose to her feet. A wild longing was upon her to call him by his name, to stretch out her arms to him.

Oh, God! But he was looking towards her now! But he had come up from the darkness of the cabin into the light. He only saw two blurred figures on the pier.

Revelle had seen the sudden change sweep across Esther's face. Swift as thought, he turned his head!

As he did so, the man also turned, and, leaning forward on the hatchway, watched those who were busily engaged in unloading. His back was presented to Revelle.

Revelle's movement had recalled Esther, awakened her to the danger! With a low cry, she sank back into the seat, her eyes half-closed, her face turned away from the barge. It was a desperate, magnificent piece of acting—for the sake of the man she loved. And she had succeeded—distracted Revelle's attention from the barge—and the man!

"Miss Mansfield!" he cried in a low voice. "You're ill! Let me——"

"I—I am all right again now!" she whispered strainedly. "It was only momentary. A sudden wave of faintness. Perhaps my father was right. I oughtn't to have gone so far to-day!"

She must keep his attention away from that barge, the man upon it! The thought that she was fighting for her lover's freedom gave her strength, and stimulated her faculties. A faint smile played round her lips—a smile that deceived the man beside her.

"I'm really quite ashamed of myself," she went on. "But perhaps I ought to be going back. Would you mind if I took your arm?"

Crump would have been prouder than ever of her, could he have seen her, heard her now! She rose up, and took Revelle's proffered arm. She dared not glance at the barge lest he should follow the direction of her eyes. With the faintest pressure of her hands, she led him between two of the glass shelters to the far side of the pier. The deck of the barge was no longer visible to them. Her touch thrilled Revelle. She pointed away across the bay to the white cliffs and the undulating downs beyond.

"That," she said, "would make another subject for a picture, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. You're awfully plucky, Miss Mansfield!"

She gave a little laugh.

"Not really. Perhaps I looked a great deal worse than I felt. It was just momentary, though I don't mind confessing that I'm very grateful to you for your arm!"

She was playing the man's own game, acting, and was beating him at it!

"But you're trembling!" he whispered a little unsteadily.

"Well, of course, I'm still a little weak. To-day's the first time that I've been out of the house you know!"

Every step was taking them farther away from the barge, and with every step Esther felt the stifling grip at her heart relax a little. As they passed off the pier, she withdrew her hand from Revelle's arm. She crushed under an almost irresistible desire to glance back. When, Revelle still escorting her, she reached the house, though she longed for the

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privacy of her own room, she sat down on the lawn, and talked to Revelle with a feverish vivacity of manner. She dreaded lest he should leave her, return perhaps to the pier. The strain upon her was frightful. To appear collected, to talk rationally, to conjure up an occasional smile to her lips—God alone knew how hard it was!

When Mr. Walters, accompanied by her father and the other men, returned, Revelle was still seated beside her on the lawn. John Mansfield noted the fact with inward approval.

"Revelle," said Mr. Walters, "you must dine with us to-night!"

"It's awfully good of you. Miss Mansfield, if you'll excuse me running away—I—er—must get away back and dress!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Walters. "We're not so punctilious here as all that. Mrs. Walters, I know, will excuse you. Miss Mansfield, would you be horribly shocked if Mr. Revelle dines with us in his present attire?"

"Of course not," answered Esther, with a little laugh.

She dreaded the idea of this man—this man whom she loathed beyond expression—being out of her sight for a moment.

"Well, 'pon my word, I hardly like to. Ah, here's Mrs. Walters!"

Revelle made his way to the lady in question. He was a little puzzled in his mind. Had John Mansfield unconsciously exaggerated when he described the meeting between Esther and Scarsdale at Roxeter Junction? When he had spoken to her first on the pier, she had been abstracted and sad in her manner; then the sudden faintness; now she seemed almost feverishly vivacious—hardly the same person! He felt quite certain, remembering the tell-tale paper beside her, that she knew of Scarsdale's escape. He was at a loss to explain these changing moods. For all his cleverness, he had not nearly plumbed the depths of Esther's character. He realised her charm, her simplicity, her womanliness in a measure; but not her strength!

Mrs. Walters insisted that he should dine with them as he stood. Then the ladies disappeared to dress. The gentlemen lingered still on the lawn. One of them took an evening paper from his pocket, and led Revelle on one side.

"I say, it looks as if it were all up with that fellow Scarsdale. The boat that was missing off St. Helen's Island was found ashore at low tide in the Thames, one side of her completely stove in. Of course, the idea is that he was run into in the dark!"

Revelle took the paper, read through the account. His eyes brightened a little, his lips smiled under his moustache.

"Not a word about this at dinner," he said in a low voice. "I think, between ourselves, that Miss Mansfield has quite got over her infatuation for the fellow, but any mention of this would be awfully painful!"

"Quite so. But if it's true, I, for one, am deuced sorry for the chap. After that plucky act of his he deserved to get clear; but, at the same time, that stove-in boat isn't absolutely conclusive evidence."

Revelle shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Heaven knows, I don't wish the fellow any harm, but—well, I know him!"

Then he joined his host. He had implied that the world would be well quit of Alexander Scarsdale.

In her bedroom Esther was upon her knees. It was a brief interval between the acts. In a few minutes she would be the actress again, playing her heart-breaking part. Her heart told her that her eyes had not played her false. He was free, near her; but for how long?

Oh, to be with him, if only for a few moments! To feel his loving arms about her, to be able to whisper to him again of her undying love.

"Alec!" she choked out, "My beloved Alec! If you would only come to me—no, no! Not that! Your freedom is most precious now. Pray God, you keep it!"

The dinner-gong started to boom out. Esther sprang to her feet, pencilled a few hurried sentences on a piece of paper, addressed the envelope to "Mr. Penworthy."

(*Continued on next page.*)

A Useful Wireless Message.

Now that the Marconi system of wireless telegraphy has been brought so prominently before the public, the minds of many readers have been turned on this subject. No doubt many messages fraught with the utmost importance will be conveyed over enormous areas of space by this principle. It would be difficult to imagine a message more important, and which resulted in more gratifying consequences, than the one which reached Miss Bessie Denbury, who lives with her parents at Washford, Somerset. In consequence of this message she underwent a course of Bile Beans, and was restored to perfect health. Speaking to a *Somerset County Express* reporter Miss Denbury said: "For over three years I was dreadfully disfigured with pimples and skin blotches all over the face and body. My face was completely disfigured. The flesh was lumpy and discoloured. The pimples enlarged, and burst like gatherings, causing such fearful pain that I have fainted away. Often I have been unable to hold myself up, so weak and sickly did I become. I had only a poor appetite, and an utterly wretched feeling overwhelmed me. I tried various measures which were equally unavailing; and the case had apparently grown hopeless, when I tried Bile Beans. It was not very long before I noticed a remarkable improvement in my appearance. I also began to eat and sleep well, and take exercise, and I am now perfectly cured. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for pimples, skin eruptions, and all blood impurities, congestion of liver, headache, dizziness, "summer fag," biliousness, indigestion, anæmia, wasting affections, and female irregularities. Obtainable from all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for one and three halfpence, or two and nine.

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Our Thrilling Serial. You can begin ... to-day.

"Mrs. Walters," she said as she entered the drawing-room, "I'm so sorry to be late."

There was no trace of the past storm of emotion on her pale, sweet face. Revelle moved across to her, and held out his arm.

"I am to have the pleasure!" he said, in his smoothest tone.

It was after dinner, after the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, that Mr. Walters approached Esther and asked her if she would sing. She made her way quietly to the piano, and glanced through the music upon it. Her father stepped up to her.

"Nothing sad, Esther," he said.

"No, father."

"Oh, but," ejaculated a sentimental young lady who had been wasting a number of rather languishing glances upon Revelle, "*do* sing something sad, please, Miss Mansfield. You know the—er—sweetest songs oft tell of saddest thoughts, or something to that effect. Don't you think so, Mr. Revelle?"

"'Pon my word, I—er—don't know that I can quite agree with you, Miss Bullivant."

He moved across to the piano and glanced at the song in Esther's hand. "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes!" was printed across the title-page.

"I wish you would," he said in a low voice, "er—sing that one."

Esther sat down at the piano, Revelle stood beside her, in readiness to turn over.

Again John Mansfield's eyes spoke silent approval. He, too, was at a loss to account for the sudden change in Esther, but the fact that it was for the better was sufficient.

Esther was playing through the opening bars. Mr. Walters tapped the banker on the shoulder.

"I say, Mansfield," he said in a whisper, "what a good-looking pair they make! Are they——?"

"Well, it hasn't quite come to that yet, but——"

Walters nodded his head, implying that he understood the situation.

"Rather hot in here, isn't it?" he added. He moved quickly across to one of the windows and flung it open.

"'Drink to me only with thine eyes——'"

The words floated out across the lawn, melodiously breaking the stillness of the night, and reaching the ears of a man who was staggering up the white road beyond the grounds.

He stopped dead.

"My God!" he panted out hoarsely. "Her song—*her voice!*"

The moonlight fell upon a haggard, old-young face, unshaved, emaciated, the hair about the temples grey.

Alec Scarsdale!

He stood for a moment swaying like a drunkard, glaring round him with staring, hungry eyes.

"'Or leave a kiss within the cup——'"

Her song, her voice! It had galvanised into life a hundred memories that scampered pell-mell through his reeling brain.

A hoarse, low cry burst from his lips; then he staggered across the road to the gate that gave access to the grounds.

A few moments later, he was creeping through shrubs to where light was shining from an open window, the transparent curtains waving softly in the night breeze.

Crouching, creeping, he reached the window.

He peered round. He could see Esther at the piano. Her back was turned to the window.

Then a convulsive spasm swept him from head to foot. He had recognised the man standing beside, and bending over her, from where he was, seeming so close.

Seaton Revelle!

Was what assistant-warder Belton had taunted him with in the prison cell, true?

For a moment he doubted; his belief in the woman he loved failed him. His white lips crinkled up like a dog's. There was nothing to live for now, but revenge!

But, thank God, it was only momentary. Only for a moment had he wronged the woman who had suffered and was suffering such agony for his sake. But the picture that he had pictured in his cell was before his eyes. His fingers were opening and shutting. He hungered to twine them round the vile hound's throat. He took a forward step—then a chorused murmur stayed him.

The song was at an end.

"Oh, thank you *so* much!"—"Charming!"—"Ben Jonson wrote the words, did he not?"—"Yes, Ben, not Samuel, don't you know. He was the fellow who wrote the dictionary; took snuff, drank an awful lot of tea, and used to say rude, smart things. A fellow called Boswell, don't you know, a bit of a prig, has written all about him!"

Every word of the small talk reached the listener outside. He had himself under control again. It was well!

Before Esther could rise, Mr. Walters had approached her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Esther," he said genuinely, "that was a great treat. Now, I'm not going to worry you. If you feel too tired, you must say so; but if you would just give us one more we should all be so delighted."

Esther half turned round on the seat.

"Is there any particular song that you would like, Mr. Walters? I might perhaps know it."

Then suddenly her eyes dilated, her lips parted. She seemed turned to stone!

"Ah, but you *are* tired! You're feeling faint!"

She drew her hand sharply across her eyes, then gave a little laugh.

"No, no! Will—will you suggest some song? I—I might know it."

She turned round again to the piano. Her fingers wandered listlessly over the keys. A few chords, then, from the chords, the refrain of a song took shape.

"True—true till death!"

"That's 'True till death" you're playing, isn't it, Miss Mansfield?" questioned Miss Bullivant.

The notes had reached the haggard-faced man who crouched outside. For a moment, that moment when Esther had seemed turned to stone, their eyes had met!

And now, God be thanked, he knew that it was a lie!

Mr. Walters was busily turning over the pile of music, searching for a song.

John Mansfield moved up to the piano.

Esther looked up at him.

"Father," she said unaffectedly, "what does this remind you of?"

She played a few bars, then sang softly, just a little tremor in her beautiful voice, but not so softly that the words did not reach him for whom they were meant.

"*Her father he has locked the door,*
Her mother holds the key,
But neither bolts nor bars shall keep
My own true love from me!"

John Mansfield patted her on the shoulder.

"Why, Esther," he said smiling, "that was the song you used to sing as a tiny mite in the nursery!"

AN INTERRUPTED MEETING.

At the end of the song, Miss Bullivant, who had come to the conclusion that Mr. Revelle was the most interesting man present, had—to use a colloquialism—made a dead set at him, and had manœuvred him away from the piano and Esther. The attention that he had been paying the latter throughout the evening had perturbed her considerably.

"It's so hot in here, Mr. Revelle!" she said, fanning herself

(*Continued on page* 191.)

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MYSTERIES OF THE EAR.

In a late number of the "Journal for the Deaf," there is a series of popular articles describing the anatomy and physiology of the ear, and the various ways of becoming deaf. This publication which is devoted entirely to the interests of those who are afflicted by deafness, or by any diseases of the ear, nose, or throat, can be obtained free by post by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W. The "Journal" also describes a Method of Treating deafness by external application that has been repeatedly successful in curing ear diseases, and in restoring hearing in cases pronounced incurable by the usual aural treatment. Those who are interested in knowing how to apply this method will find that each "Journal" is accompanied by a Patient's Report Form, which enables anyone to receive full particulars as to the use of the treatment at home. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free.

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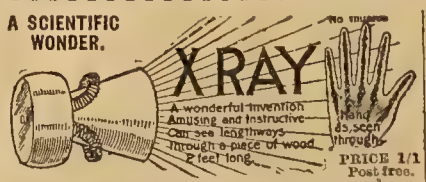
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a little petulantly. "Please take me into the garden. We shall be able to hear the song there, just as well!"

Mr. Walters had selected a song. Esther had caught Miss Bullivant's words. Revelle was moving towards the window.

"Mr. Revelle," said Esther, a little quickly, he must not go out into the garden! "Would you mind very much turning over for me again!"

"With pleasure."

Miss Bullivant bit her lips, and mentally designated Esther Mansfield a designing minx. Revelle was conscious of a decided thrill of satisfaction at being recalled to her side. There was no trace of sadness in the song that Esther sang. A colour had mounted to her cheeks; her eyes were flashing brightly. Not a soul within the room dreamt of the frightful tension on nerve and heart; but outside the man, who was crouching among the shrubs, knew! "But neither bolts not bars shall keep my own true love from me!" The words were ringing in his ears. Borne on the wings of music, her two messages had reached him, and he had understood. He would wait there. She would come to him that night!

The song over, Esther retired into a corner of the room away from the window, Revelle accompanying her. Though Miss Bullivant employed every device known to her to lure him from her side, she failed utterly.

"I say, old chap," whispered one of the men to his neighbour, "Revelle is making the running pretty fast with Esther Mansfield. Nobody else can get a look in!"

"Yes. He's a lucky dog. She's positively charming; but I don't think it's all on one side. The way she outmanœuvred Miss Bullivant just now was quite masterly. As a matter of fact there's a rumour afloat that they're engaged, and it does look very much like it; but I suppose it won't be announced for a while." The speaker dropped his voice to a low whisper: "You see, it seems only the other day that she was engaged to that poor chap Scarsdale."

Mrs. Walters cast a sweeping, inquiring glance round at the ladies; then rose to her feet. Good-night was said. The ladies retired to their bedrooms; the gentlemen to the smoking-room.

Once in her room, the mask fell from Esther's face. She stood for a moment, the flush faded from her face, panting quickly, as though the terrible strain had physically exhausted her. Then she went to the window and peered through the blinds. The light was still shining out from the drawing-room below. Straining her eyes, she tried to penetrate the darkness; but, though she could distinguish nothing, she felt that he understood, was waiting for her.

"Alec," she whispered, "are you there? I'm coming to you, my love, soon now!"

She left the window, and, having donned a hooded cloak, extinguished the light. Having opened her door ever such a little, she sat down close beside to listen. It seemed an eternity of time before the sounds that she longed for reached her ears—voices and footsteps ascending the stairs. The men were retiring to bed at last.

She still sat listening—heard the sounds of the servants locking up. Then an absolute silence prevailed.

Her heart was beating fiercely, her limbs trembling as she crept out of her room into the darkness of the corridor and groped her way to the top of the stairs.

The front door was locked. The key had been removed.

She paused for a moment, for all her beating heart and trembling limbs, her mind was unnaturally clear. She must get out through the drawing-room. She shut her eyes tightly for a second as if to assist her memory, and conjured up a picture of the ground-floor as she knew it by daylight. Only a woman, nerved and guided by love, yet neither the Marquis nor Benny Beard could have moved more silently and unerringly than she did. Only a faint click of the latch told of her passing into the drawing-room. A mental picture of the room was before her. She remembered the exact position of the furniture. Without so much as brushing against anything, she reached the shutters. She raised up the iron bar, opened them. The moonlight was streaming on to the lawn.

She opened the window—it creaked a little.

A rustling came from the shrubs that fringed the lawn. They parted. The moonlight fell upon a hungry, haggard face, unshaved, emaciated!

A swift-moving shadow flitted across the lawn.

Two low, whispered cries, simultaneous, and blending so that they seemed but one!

The moonlight was upon two figures locked in each other's arms, on the threshold of the open window; then they vanished into the darkness of the room. And for a time the silence was so great, the room might have been empty!

* * * * *

"I say, Revelle, old chap. Wake up! But don't make a noise! Something's up! There's someone in the house."

Revelle sat up abruptly in his bed. Gerald Phipps was at his side.

"What?"

"Couldn't sleep—look sharp, out you get and put some clothes on—went to open my window wider—saw somebody dart across the lawn—there's a strong moon on. It fairly staggered me. When I shoved my head out, drawing-room window below was open. No sign of anybody."

Revelle was already out of bed.

"Look here," he said in a low, sharp voice, "no need to wake anybody. We can see this job through by ourselves, Phipps! This isn't my first experience of this sort of business!"

"Right!" whispered Phipps excitedly.

"Put out that light!" said Revelle. "We shall work better without it."

He, too, was conscious of a strong sense of excitement.

"Come on. Keep close behind me. When in doubt, catch hold of me."

He led the way silently out of the room. If he brought this affair off successfully, he would earn quite a reputation for himself as a thief-taker. A shadowy smile played across his features. The irony of the situation had tickled his sense of humour. He, too, like Esther, seemed to have a picture of the surroundings photographed on his brain. He never hesitated; made no mistake. More than once his companion behind was obliged to reach out and catch hold for guidance. Revelle would have done better alone.

The existence of one more step than he had anticipated at the foot of the stairs suddenly precipitated Phipps to the ground with a thud, and drew from him a muttered exclamation.

Revelle left him to look after himself, and, despite the darkness, made a straight line for the drawing-room door.

* * * * *

In the darkness the escaped convict held the woman he loved in his trembling arms. For a while both had been silent, their hearts too full for words! But they were whispering now, incoherent quick words of love, undying hope, and mutual belief. The power to reason coldly, make plans for the future, had not yet returned to them. The passionate joy of being together overmastered all.

"You will never doubt me, Alec," whispered Esther, as she drew his unshaved face down to hers and kissed him, "whatever the world may say! I am yours—yours—yours for always. Oh, Alec, thank God for this moment!"

"Amen to that," he breathed out hoarsely.

Again a silence, heart beating against heart, lips pressed to lips, soul in unison with soul!

"Alec, when you—you go from me, where—will you go?"

"God knows—what's that?"

A faint thud, accompanied by a sharp though muffled expression had just reached him. Esther, too, had heard. Her face had turned the colour of death.

"Go!" she breathed out chokingly, "for God's sake, go!"

He hesitated, for the moment not thinking of himself, but of woman he loved. It meant her reputation compromised! It meant——

"If you love," she whispered in her agony, "go!"

Scaton Revelle's hand was on the handle of the door.

(Another splendid instalment next Tuesday.)

By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

A Fearsome Father.

"Laurie" is in business and dependent on his father for his financial support. He is also living at home, which is a great pecuniary saving to him. He has now fallen in love with their servant, but knows that if he told his parents he would be dismissed from home, and would lose his father's financial support—perhaps to the detriment of his whole career.

* * * *

Now, what advice does "Laurie" suppose would be given him in cold blood in such a matter as this? On the one side his whole chances of success in life, on the other a girl for whom he may entertain simply a passing passion, and probably poverty. Of course, "Laurie," if your father is, as you say, likely to cut you off if you continue this love affair, your duty is to wait until such time as your business position warrants you in making your own choice of a wife, when presumably your father would see that any objections to your marriage from him could not have any effect.

❦❦❦

"P. W.'s" Advice Taken.

"Veilchen" some time ago asked the advice of the Editor of *Pearson's Weekly* on the question of how to make the acquaintance of those whom you admire but do not know. She has since adopted the advice given by him, with results different from what she anticipated.

* * * *

I will not go far into details, as "Veilchen" wishes me not to give the whole of her story, but, briefly, it is as follows: For some time she noticed in her daily walks that a man looked admiringly at her. He was of lower social position than herself. After a time she grew to wish to know him, and gave him a hint to this effect. On receiving the hint, to her astonishment, the man seemed completely abashed, and avoided her whenever he saw her. "Veilchen" now feels that she has done a very foolish thing, and suffers continued regret for having done so.

* * * *

I am very sorry for you, "Veilchen." I do not think you did wrong in giving the hint, as you had some reason to suppose that the liking between yourself and this man was mutual and genuine. As to why he took the hint as he did is another matter. There were, no doubt, reasons beneath the surface. One is that possibly he was married, and, while content to look his admiration, would not dare to carry it further. Another is that he was afraid to know you because he might not be in a position to make any proposals of marriage, and desired to avoid going too far. Yet another possible solution is that his look was merely one of admiration for you—perhaps you are a very attractive-looking girl—which did not convey any suggestion of a desire to make your acquaintance. The world is only too full of men who dare not do more than look the things they feel. This being perhaps the case, I should not worry any more about the matter. You have evidently misinterpreted those looks he gave you, and I do not suppose he thought any the worse of you. I have yet to meet the man who did think worse of a girl for returning his admiration. I shall be glad to hear further from you.

❦❦❦

A Prospective Mother-in-Law.

What are you to do when the girl's mother will not let you alone for five minutes together? Thus "Perplexed," who is engaged to a girl, and whose engagement is sanctioned by the mother; yet that good lady always manages to be in the same room when "Perplexed" pays his visits.

* * * *

Evidently the mother requires a good deal of vigorous hinting. Try the following. When you hear her approaching, discontinue your embraces just as she opens the doors When she is in the room, sit perfectly silent. Directly she goes out prepare, as it were, to renew the fray. If, after a while, she does not get a little tired of this kind of thing, arrange always to meet the girl elsewhere—at a friend's house, or somewhere out of doors, near a country lane. If the mother follows her there also, I should advise you either to be prepared to take on board a mother-in-law of the most extreme character, to share with you your marital relations, or to break off the engagement.

❦❦❦

A Lenient Lover.

Before the war broke out, "Nemo" was engaged to one whom he thought was the dearest girl in the world. One morning recently he learnt that she had eloped the previous night with an admirer of three weeks' standing, who had more money than he. Since then the man has been imprisoned for bigamy, and the girl has written "Nemo" to ask him to take her back on the old footing. "Nemo" still loves her, but fears he can never again trust her.

* * * *

If your love is so constant that it endures after such unpardonable conduct on her part, I should certainly not counsel you to give her up. You evidently see qualities in her which are not evident from your story of her behaviour. Perhaps she was cajoled or deceived into eloping with the man in question, in which case her severe lesson must endure for life, and you would be safe in resuming the old relations. What her reasons were for her conduct you surely know, and will be the best judge as to her true character. If her elopement was of her own free will, and was carried out with the full knowledge that she was deceiving you, I can see little prospect that such a girl will make you a faithful wife.

❦❦❦

Wants to Educate his Sweetheart.

"Sincere" is engaged to a girl whose education has been neglected. He himself is well off, and would pay from £50 to £100 a year for two years or so, with a view to improving her. How can he proceed?

* * * *

I think, if there are no questions involved as to her willingness to accept "Sincere's" assistance, the best thing would be for the girl to go to one of the religious convent schools in Belgium, France, or Germany for a while. Lots of English girls go to these schools, and learn several languages, as well as music, and other useful accomplishments. Besides this, they get a good idea of the world through mixing with girls of various nationalities, and there would not be the same social prejudice abroad as might stand in the girl's way at an English school. If "Sincere" can do this, he should write to the British and Foreign Schools Society, Temple Chambers, London, E.C., where all information on such a point could be obtained.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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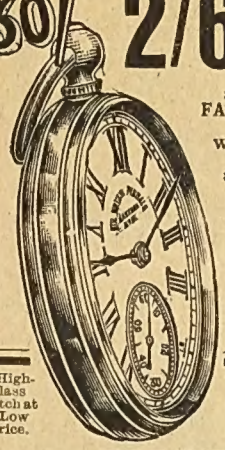

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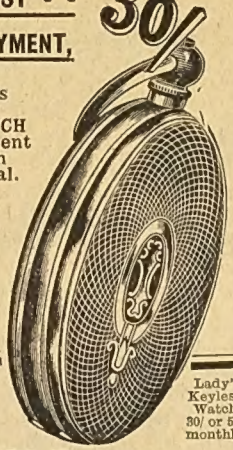

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